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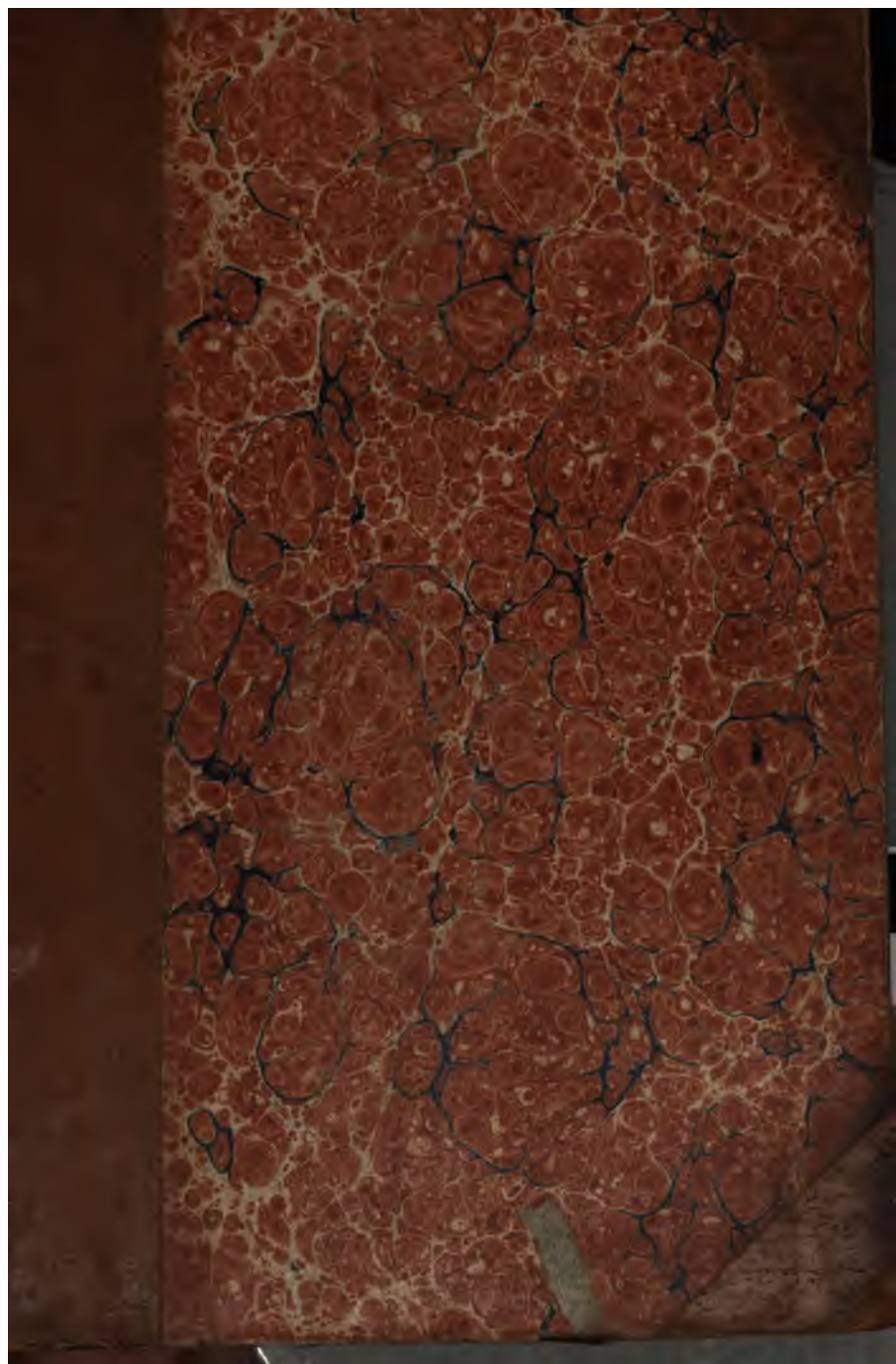
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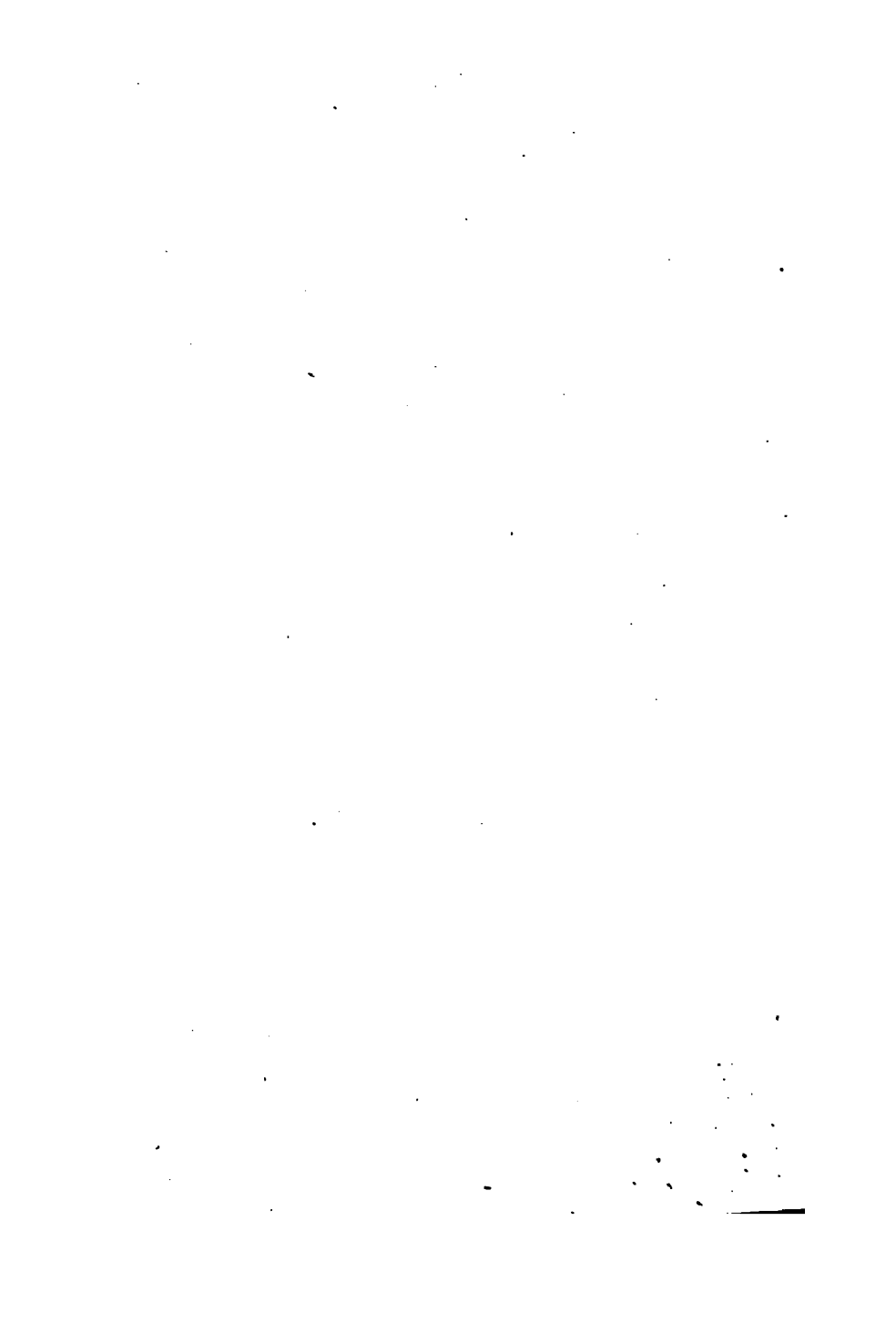
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**ARTHUR OF BRITANNY.**

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# ARTHUR OF BRITANNY,

AN

HISTORICAL TALE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE TEMPLARS."

---

" Young Plantagenet,  
Son to the elder brother of this John,  
And king o'er him and all that he enjoys."

*King John.*

---

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# ERRATA TO VOL. II.

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- Page 30, 6 lines from bottom, for "i," read *in*.  
— 94, 3 ditto ditto, for "Maloisie," read *Malvesie*.  
— 98, 9 ditto ditto, for "was," read *were*.  
— 117, 5 ditto from top, after "and," insert *by which were*.  
— 298, 14 ditto for "it closed," read *closed it*.  
— 301, 2 ditto for "what," read *which*.

LONDON:

HENRY BAYLIS, JOHNSON'S-COURT, FLEET-STREET.

# ARTHUR OF BRITANNY.

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## CHAPTER I.

"What doth he here?  
I did not send for him—he is unbidden."

*Manfred.*

WHEN Hubert de Bourgh parted from Albert, after their interview at Roger Mallet's, his intention was instantly to have quitted Winchester, before any accident had discovered his being in the neighbourhood. He had already noticed more than one intrusive glance, and aware, both how shallow was his disguise, as

also how inconvenient and even fatal would be any recognition, he hurried quickly through the gloomiest parts of the city; and was even now stealing through the gate, when he accidentally caught a glimpse of a figure that passed him, which he fancied to be that of one of the most powerful of the confederates, then believed to be nearly one hundred miles distant.

He stood still for a moment to recall his brief glance, but the fact which it denoted appeared so impossible, that the next he was again hastening on, when he encountered a second, which, dark as it was, he at once knew to be that of Hugh Neville, the Lord of Moubray, from whom he had parted not two days before, and who then had not even hinted an intention of visiting the court.

So unexpected a coincidence, as well as its seeming mystery, could not fail to perplex him, nor alarm a mind so sensitively alive to the success of the enterprise, lest any unforeseen accident had endangered their plans; or what was even worse, any treachery lurked beneath the mask of professed devotion.

He turned quickly back, and muffling himself in his cloak, closely followed them into the city. There seemed, however, to be no understanding between them, for after proceeding some short distance up the High-street, they branched off in opposite directions.

Neville was the nearest to De Bourgh, and had also taken the most secluded route; him, therefore, without further hesitation, he followed. He promptly came up with him, and after again scrutinizing him, and assuring himself of the correctness of his belief, he tapped him gently on the shoulder.

The baron turned sharply round, and instantly recognized De Bourgh, though the discovery seemed in nowise pleasurable to him; the latter's eager gaze, indeed, detected no slight confusion in his countenance.

"Ha! De Bourgh," he exclaimed in the manner of one who knew not exactly what to say; "thou here?—who would—I—I—why—where did you spring from?"

"It is I surely enough," replied De Bourgh

sarcastically ; “ the only doubt would be, Master Neville, whether it is indeed *thou* ? ”

“ By my troth, De Bourgh,” returned the other, attempting to smile off the hesitation of his manner, “ I am somewhat dubious on that point myself.”

“ What sudden call, Moubray,” continued De Bourgh, in the same cool manner, “ has brought thee here ? ’Tis not yet forty-eight hours since we parted, and then you did not seem to have even an idea of such a journey.”

“ ’Tis all very true, De Bourgh, but circumstances alter cases, and—here I am.”

“ So I perceive,” carelessly returned De Bourgh. “ I merely alluded to the suddenness of your movement, and your reserve thereupon. You will no doubt recollect, Moubray, that our conversation, when we parted, was of a somewhat confidential and particular nature ? ”

“ I have not, De Bourgh, forgotten either the conversation or its character, and by the honour of a true knight, it is sacred with me.”

“ Hugh Neville,”—the baron started at De

Bourgh's altered tone—"there are times when hesitation is a folly and reserve a madness; of such is the present season, and however it may annoy you, I must speak openly and to the point. If I mistake not, my Lord Moubray is pledged with many others, as brave and loyal souls, to give his best aid to place his lawful sovereign on the throne?"

The baron was silent.

"Thou art silent, Master Neville," continued De Bourgh, in an even more caustic tone; "as if my words were not so pleasant as honey to thy taste, or thy love of truth forbade thee to deny an assertion, which thou knowest to be fact—Moubray, do we meet as friends or as foes? I believe thee honest, not even in face of the suspicion, which this sudden visit and thy conscious silence thereupon raise against thee, will I admit the possibility of thy treachery, till thy true lips declare it—what sayest thou?"

"That thy suspicions," retorted the baron, with quick indignation, "are untrue, and that if thou meanest to impute to me—"

"Moubray," quickly interrupted De Bourgh, as if anxious to stay the impending storm, "I impute nothing—I believe that if Hugh Neville is famed for aught more than his valour, 'tis for his unimpeached veracity, and to that I appeal—let us at least part without anger; if we meet not as friends, and thou desirest to withhold thy confidence, pass on; the way is wide enough for us both, and no preventing hand is upon thee."

The baron hesitated for a moment, then moved a few paces forward; but a better spirit seemed suddenly to come across his mind; he turned quickly round and again approaching De Bourgh, addressed him—

"De Bourgh, we have been long and near friends, even now hast thou been my guest, and in the full trust of my devotion to your enterprise, thou hast divulged to me thy most hidden purposes; as I said before, all is here safely bestowed, nor needest thou fear even the slightest hint ever escaping me; sacred as my honour is your secret."

"I believe thee, Moubray," observed De



Bourgh, perceiving that he hesitated ; “ I could not, even in thought, have wronged thee by a suspicion so base.”

“ I certainly did promise thee my co-operation, and as certainly did I intend to fulfil my promise, nor, when we separated, knew I of this early journey ; but even in the brief time which has since elapsed, events have compelled a change in my opinions, and I will not deny, that I am here more as an unwilling servant of the king, than the supporter of thy young prince.”

“ That, Moubray,” replied De Bourgh, with his previous bitterness, “ thy presence at this time and in this manner already told me ; but methinks, either thy assurances of support must have been but slightly felt, or the events of which thou speakest, must have been peculiarly effective, to produce this sudden and extreme change in your decision.”

“ I will not,” said Moubray, “ return thy candour, De Bourgh, with either duplicity or reserve. The real fact is this : I am suddenly cited by this usurper, whom in my soul I

abhor, as well for his injustice and cruelty as for his cowardly meanness, to appear before him, and declare my attachment to his government; and threatened, in case of a refusal, with forfeiture and imprisonment. Now, De Bourgh, I am not strong enough to resist the tyrannic power; certain ruin therefore awaits me, unless I submit: and on the other hand, what is there beyond my own disgust, to prevent my submission? Your plans are not yet at maturity—so far indeed are they from any certain footing, that as yet nothing is done beyond secret devisings, which, however probable or promising of success, mean little, nor give encouragement to commit one's fortunes and safety on so doubtful a contingency. In projects of this dangerous nature, there should be mutual incitement for each step in its advance—the countenance of numbers—”

“All of which,” interrupted De Bourgh, softened by the baron's openness, into a far kinder feeling, “will almost instantly be ours—we only wait—”

“Ay, 'tis that *waiting*,” hastily exclaimed.

the baron; "that is the misfortune, and, among others, stands between the desired wish, and the compelled actions of Hugh Neville; for while you are thus waiting, I am constrained to decide, even against my own inclinations, to take part with your opponents."

"Say not so, my dear Moubray," quickly returned De Bourgh, "for I will not thus part with one so highly esteemed, and whose co-operation is of such indispensable value to us; our plans, indeed, are far nearer to maturity than thou suspectest—even within this very week is there appointed a general meeting of the confederates, to concert the final plan of the rising, as also to receive our faithful ally King Philip's ambassador, and through him the firm assurance of his unyielding support; from such an assembly I would hope that Hugh Neville will not surely absent himself?"

"Would I had sooner known thy plans, De Bourgh"—the baron spoke musingly,—"I had then e'en stayed at home, and saved myself this harassing journey; but here I am—

and, whatever the issue, I may as well see the king, and learn what terms he offers; for thou knowest I can nothing without money, and what chance hast thou of that? His French majesty, I ween, has need of all that he can get, in place of lending."

"*There* also we are provided,"—Moubray looked doubtful at De Bourgh's assertion,—"*to* our fullest wants, Neville, are we provided."

"Ha!" exclaimed the baron, in great surprise, "only two days ago thou wast fearful of that, Master De Bourgh—nay, almost questioned the possibility of raising any aids."

"True enough, Moubray, but accident has since supplied us to our fullest content."

"Then, by my halidome, I have, indeed, been premature," replied the baron in evident vexation; "curse on my doubts! I questioned thy ability to meet my need, and—"

"Therefore sought to secure thy peace with the usurper," bluntly interrupted De Bourgh; "but have a care, Moubray, that thou fullest not into his subtle net—thou knowest the man—perhaps, both thou and my Lord of Salisbury

may, ere long, have cause to rue your confidence."

"Salisbury!"—the baron seemed confounded—"what, Fitz-Arnulf also here? I like not that."

"I passed him even now, as I met thee, Moubray, and I should imagine that his summons has been as sudden as thine own."

"I'll see him, however, ere I go a jot further;"—the baron seemed perplexed with doubt, as he spoke—"if his purpose be the same as mine, there must be something more in the measure than I can see through, to bend his stubborn hatred to submission."

"I only say, beware, Neville,"—De Bourgh spoke with an air of mystery—"Salisbury's steps seem as open and as careless as thine own, though I am in no way able to divine the purpose of his visit."

"But *I* will know it," wrathfully exclaimed the baron, "ere many hours have passed—what sayest thou, De Bourgh, wilt thou meet me at this hour and place to-morrow evening?"

"With pleasure, Moubray; and thou wilt

promise in no way further to commit thyself until then?"

"Gramercy, that I will," said the baron; "I am not in much fear of altering my position, until I am better satisfied of the result."

"Be cautious, Moubray; bethink thee well that suspicion and distrust lurk every where around thee."

"Trust me for that; depend upon it, I have not paid for dearly bought experience in vain; at the hour I shall expect you—till then, adieu:—my measures must be prompt, or they will be useless;" and he instantly passed away, leaving De Bourgh a prey to anxious and perplexing thoughts.

It was, indeed, no common surprise that he felt, on considering the strange interruption to his plans, which this interview seemed to prognosticate:—"What, indeed," he anxiously asked himself, "could this secret summons to two such prominent leaders mean? Might not others as important be also included therein? Accident scarcely could have produced such a coincidence—was it possible that their plans

were betrayed—Salisbury, too, of all others?"—  
De Bourgh seemed bewildered with doubt.

That almost any motive, short of the tyrant's death, could have brought the Earl of Salisbury to any neighbourhood which John cursed with his presence, seemed as inexplicable to De Bourgh as it was to Lord Moubray; for no being could have been more infamously wronged, nor proud indignant spirit have more bitterly resented his wrongs, than Fitz-Arnulf had and did resent his.

Originally the friend and companion of the young princes, his age and rank well fitting him for such a relation, he had not only joined them in their rebellions against their father; but, when Richard, on acceding to the throne, marked his repentance of his unnatural conduct by retaining his parent's friends, and discarding all those of his own former companions, who had persuaded or assisted him in his violence, the Earl of Salisbury bound himself still more closely to the reprobate John, nor spared any attentions to gain his attachment.

And when the traitor, foiled in his treachery

against his brother, and doubting in his own perfidious heart the possibility that Richard could forgive so vile ingratitude, skulked to some unknown hiding-place, Fitz-Arnulf's castle was open to receive him; nor was any kindness spared that either hospitality or friendship could suggest.

The return which the dissolute John made him was vile indeed, but it was no exception to the wonted baseness of his conduct: he made use of the leisure and opportunities, which the earl's protection afforded him, to debauch his wife; and then, as if no vileness was too vile, made a jest of her disgrace, and discarded the wretch, whom his villany had driven from her home, to mockery and contempt. The earl's indignant rage at the rankling dishonour done to his tenderest feelings, and the devilish ingratitude wherewith his long and uniform kindness had been repaid, knew no limit—from the hour that he became acquainted with his disgrace, he had devoted himself to curse the monster; and his whole after life had been one steady quest of that deeply formed purpose.



By what means, therefore, or for what intent he had been thus, so contrary to his previous violence, induced even to a semblance of duty—for his coming for any other purpose seemed too madly perilous for De Bourgh even to surmise one—was altogether inexplicable.

He had not only given his sanction to the cause of the Duke of Brittany, but was behind few in professed zeal for its advancement; and was believed to be exerting his influence to extend the views of the party, at the very moment when he thus openly appeared in the very citadel of his opponent.

Turning over these strange contradictions in his mind, as he still stood fixed to the spot where Moubray had left him, De Bourgh resolved to abide his appointment, however other anxious purposes might suffer by the delay; and naturally solicitous both to communicate to Albert so mysterious incidents, as also to consult with him on the possibility, as well as expediency, of his undertaking those distant arrangements of which his unexpected deten-

tion prevented his own notice, he turned his steps towards the back of the royal palace, where the youth's apartments were situated, in the faint hope that some accident might enable him to communicate with him, or that, even yet, Albert might not have returned from Roger Mallet's.

He had already been for some time on the eager watch, when he suddenly observed a dark figure emerge from one of the gallery windows, and, to his great astonishment, gradually descend from one projection to another, until he stood safely on the ground at his side : his surprise in no way abated, when he discovered that the object of his notice was none other than Phœdrus, the king's jester, who had, in fact, just then given Albert his mysterious warning, and was thus escaping from any detection of his intrusion by a way, dangerous indeed, but which use had to him made practicable.

It may be imagined that De Bourgh omitted not the agency of so useful an ally ; he briefly declared his anxiety to see the young page, and appointing with the jester a rendezvous for

their meeting, left the bringing of it about to his care, confident it could not have been trusted to better hands.

Phœdrus instantly proceeded on his commission with zeal, and that peculiar management which seemed so natural to him. Despised, as too generally the sayer of sayings was, he possessed one advantage that saved him from universal contempt; his office, among other privileges, gave him a certain freedom of the royal cellar, which, though not altogether so extensive as some might have wished, was quite sufficient to make him the envy of many, and his favour to be not unfrequently courted by some, whose bibacious propensities were stronger than their scorn of the jester.

Availing himself, therefore, of this known influence, Phœdrus dexterously diverted Mil Nierennit, one of the king's body-guard, from the rest of his colleagues, and, by the timely application of a few bumpers of sack, speedily ingratiated himself into the fellow's good opinion. Mil, brute as he was, was certainly a shade better than his brother, Nym Jamy,

though, far as he might be below him in brutal ferocity, he was yet as trusty and as useful to his royal master; and whatever other difference might exist between them, certainly excelled Nym in his love and capacity for his favourite sherris-sack—a capacity and love, by the by, which materially assisted Phœdrus' present design. Doubtful, however, of the full influence of any quantity of drink, which might be stowed into such a case-hardened receptacle as Mil's, he slyly mixed a suitable addition of narcotic juice into his cup, which speedily disposed of him in a sleep, profound as his extremest wishes could have desired; he then lost no time in easing him of his external suit, and locking him snugly in his room, soon emerged, to all appearance, as the identical Mil Nierenuit himself. It was already some hours past midnight, and creeping softly to Albert's door, he successively employed all his mimic arts, until, in the end, he succeeded in drawing the youth's attention, as has already been stated, and thereby obtained admittance to him.

For the first few moments he forgot his own

disguise, and had already approached some paces towards Albert, greatly at a loss to account for his alarm, when suddenly recollecting himself, he quickly terminated the youth's agitation, by declaring—

“’Tis but Phœdrus, Master de Bourgh—the simple jester in this awful garb—not, perhaps, much unlike the poor ass in the lion’s skin, and, forsooth, quite as harmless.”

The first sound of his voice released Albert from his trepidation, and he could now scarcely refrain himself within any moderation from the laughter, into which his friend Phœdrus’ awkward grimaces, in mockery of the ruffian Mil, threw him.

Time, however, pressed for instant measures, and Phœdrus, briefly explaining his commission, urged Albert at once to commit himself to his guidance.

It may be well imagined how delighted the young man was to learn so happy an incident, as De Bourgh’s delay; through it, indeed, the king’s mission was promptly secured, the

Princess Eleanor's suggestion put into a fair train for being brought about, and his own plans answered to his fullest content; he quickly prepared for his journey, and accoutring himself as if for a lengthy absence, followed Phœdrus warily towards the back lodge. Not a soul was stirring within the castle, and they reached the gate without any interruption. The disguised Phœdrus there boldly demanded egress with no small effect—the drunken Mil was a privileged man at all times, and specially during darkness were his movements free, without even inquiry; the half-wakened warder surlily opened the gate, and bestowing a low curse as well on the supposed miscreant, as upon his deeds, suffered both him and his companion to pass through; the sentinel scarcely troubled them with a look, and in a few minutes they were safe beyond any further risk of detection.

Phœdrus hastened quickly to the appointed rendezvous, and, delivering Albert to the expecting De Bourgh, waited not further, but at

once hurried back to secure his return and the restoration of his borrowed plumes, ere daylight betrayed him, or the drugged potion had lost its effect upon the sotted ruffian.

## CHAPTER II.

“Disguise, I see, thou art a wickedness,  
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.”

*Twelfth Night.*

THE conference between De Bourgh and his young friend was long and deeply interesting; mutual explanations passed of the events which had happened to each, as well as of the important measures which called for their instant notice.

Their plans were soon arranged, and Albert set out at break of day to seek an interview with the Duke of Ramsay, if possible, by such arguments as De Bourgh pointed out, to induce him to join the latter at Winchester,



and submit to pay a semblance of respect to the offended usurper : the duke was known to be already well inclined to the cause, and there seemed little doubt, that to secure to it so many advantages, as such a concession promised, he would yield some little of his own wrathful feelings.

While, therefore, his young associate proceeded to attempt such a result, De Bourgh waited with no small impatience the projected meeting with Lord Moubray. The day seemed as if it never would have reached a termination, so heavily, to his anxious expectation, did each hour pass away ; and the sun had scarcely yet sunk below the horizon, when De Bourgh was already on the way to the appointed rendezvous.

Muffled up with no small care, he seemed to defy recognition, nor, even in his most fearful apprehension, did a fear of accident occur to him : he neglected not, indeed, any caution, and sought the spot by the most circuitous route, for that it was the more secluded, and less subject to observation.

All his precautions, however, had nigh proved fruitless; his route obliged him to cross the High-street, and at the very instant that he was stealing quickly over, the city beadle was proclaiming a public fair to be held that selfsame week.

Anxious to gain every information that could in any way affect his plans, as well as prompt to turn it to the advancement of his designs, De Bourgh paused a moment to hear the proclamation. A Jew-pedler stood before him, seemingly as intent as any of the crowd upon the crier's words; as, however, De Bourgh, striving to learn the jeering remarks of two suspicious-looking personages still further in the centre of the crowd, leaned eagerly forward, that same movement, as it rendered him in some degree open to the pedler's observation, gave him a better view of the man's countenance, and he at once detected, in spite of his black flowing beard, an expression in his eye, which, under any disguise, he would at once have recognized. He perceived that he was noticed, and retiring hastily from the

crowd, sought to conceal himself in the darker gloom of a narrow entry.

His motions, however, were narrowly watched, and the next moment the pedler was again at his side; he walked closely round him, and narrowly scrutinized his person, but De Bourgh's muffled face and form now betrayed no appearance of his real self. Foiled in his evident desire to satisfy himself of some secret suspicion, the pedler next addressed him in a feigned voice;—

“ Would de shentilman dwish do zee hiz pack—vary goot dings, and vary sheap, and all quoite new ?”

“ No,” was De Bourgh's brief reply, afraid even to trust his own proficiency in disguising his voice.

“ Me dinks,” returned the pedler, with a peculiarly taunting impudence; “ dat de shentilman and me has met before dis.”

“ Indeed !” returned De Bourgh, retreating a few steps further back.

But the man was in no way daunted by De Bourgh's so evident avoidance; he still followed;

as if determined to force him to some disclosure of himself, or hoping to catch unawares some hint of his real identity; he crept softly up to him, and whispered in his ears—

“ Me knows de shentilman well enow—dat voice is rather doo plain.”

Again did De Bourgh, desirous to escape his impertinence, retreat still further up the passage: and again did the troublesome pedler persist in following him.

“ Mine friend,” he observed in the same taunting tone; “ you and I must speak of dis again—de man wot dries do hide, should not come do de light.”

“ Nor should he that seeks a quarrel,” retorted De Bourgh, conscious that some bold effort would alone rid him of his inconvenient company, “ come with his adversary into so secluded a spot as this,” at the same time he suddenly drew forth his rapier.

The manœuvre was sufficiently effective, the pedler’s impudence seemed seconded by no supporting courage; he started violently back, as if the weapon had already punished his

intrusion, and then turning quickly round, took to his heels, and darted from the entry.

De Bourgh guessed well enough, as to the probability of the man's instant return, and that supported by less yielding spirits than his own, and in no ways desirous to encounter the probable odds that might speedily be upon him, he scrupled not to imitate the pedler's example, though such a movement was by no means an usual one with him, and running as swiftly as his legs would carry him in the contrary direction, soon placed himself beyond the risk of any probable detection.

The delay which this incident occasioned, as well from its actual detention, as the circuitous route by which it compelled him to seek his appointment, caused him to reach it some time past the hour named; and to his great chagrin and mortification, there was no appearance of any one to meet him. Believing that Moubray had already been, and not otherwise knowing how to counteract the disappointment, he was, after an anxious waiting of some minutes, proceeding in instant quest of the ob-

ject of his solicitude, when the suppressed voices and cautious footsteps of some persons approaching him, promptly staggered his purpose; he drew closely within the cover of a deep door-way, by which he was standing, and awaited their nearer approach with no inconsiderable nervousness.

He had scarcely so concealed himself, ere they reached the spot where he had stood, and he at once discerned the Jew-pedler, accompanied by the two worthies, Nym Jamy and Mil Nierenuit—a discovery, by the by, which in no degree relieved his anxiety; they all three stood still immediately opposite to where De Bourgh had hid himself, so close, indeed, that the ruffian Jamy's back almost touched him, and he heard the pedler exclaim in undisguised accents —

“ We're too late, after all, Nym—curse on that fellow's impudence, had we not been hunting after him, we had been here in time: art sure, Nym, thou wast right in the hour?”

“ Sure?” retorted the ruffian, in a tone of a most perfect equality; “ when did Nym Jamy

ever flounder in his information? Sure, indeed! I was as near to them as Mil is now to me, and I heard every syllable—sure, forsooth!”

“ Well, well, my good counsellor,” returned the pedler, in conciliating accents; “ there needs no warmth—the men are *not* here, that is evident enough—whence the difference ’twixt the fact and thy information, I pretend not to say—but tell me again, Nym, what said the traitors?”

“ E’en as I told you, that they were to meet some one, at this hour and place, who would expose the base usurper, meaning yourself, oh, King! in your true colours.”

“ The traitor-villains,” bitterly exclaimed the seeming pedler. “ Oh, that we had them here, and they had each a hundred lives a piece, that your trusty blades, my dainty ones, might have the merrier work, or even that impudent varlet, had we him, by God’s teeth, he should jig for it.”

De Bourgh in no way relished his near neighbourhood to so friendly disposed a trio;

he squeezed himself still closer within his hiding-place.

“ But,” continued the disguised tyrant, “ surely, Nym, thou must have known the speakers ?”

De Bourgh drew in his breath with excess of anxiety.

“ Nay,” was the fellow’s careless reply, “ not I. I could scarcely see them from where I lay, and I knew none of their voices.”

The listener breathed somewhat more freely.

“ Nor the meddling fool, who was to steal their hearts from us—”

“ That’s me,” thought De Bourgh.

“ —Couldst thou not, Nym, catch his name ?”

The perspiration stood thickly on De Bourgh’s forehead, as the villain paused in his reply ; but he again felt assured safety, when Nym, after a short reflection, replied i a sullen tone, as if annoyed at the continued questioning—

“ Not I, i’ faith. I have already said, that they spoke not his name but in an under-voice, and that only once.”



"Thou hast used but half thy wonted adroitness in the business, methinks, Nym," returned the pedler, "or thou hadst gained us more wholesome food for our proceeding."

"Nay, blame not me," impudently interrupted the dogged ruffian, "'tis all thine own obstinacy; hadst thou come at the right time, in place of mixing in the beadle's mob, we had e'en now secured the traitors, and perhaps too saved thee from their thirsty knives."

"Hush, hush!" quickly replied the trembling coward, "talk not of that, Nym—that thou knowest cannot be, so long as Mil and thee are near me—oh, no—my good friends will, I know, save me from that. Here, good Nym, take this purse, and thou, my trusty Mil, take this—watch closely and truly, and they are not the last."

"Such a cursed good paymaster," hiccupped the reeling Mil, whose silence and evident disorder still declared Master Phœdrus' last night's policy, "keeps me thine for ever, only thou'd be far surer of me did I get more sack; they're so cursed stingy of their drink—

a sucking-pig would swallow all that has entered my gullet this fortnight past, and miss a headache next morning—a murrain on them !”

“ My dear Mil,” prayed his conciliating master, “ thy potion shall be doubled—nay, even to thy heart’s content shalt thou have it, Mil, so thou be’est satisfied, and failest not thy master’s need—now have I not, Mil, deserved well of thee ?”

“ Umph !” considered the ruffian, affecting excessive importance, “ what thinkest, our gentle brother Nym ?—hast thou any grievance, Nym ?—now’s the time, my boy.”

“ Why, if I had, my sweet one, this pretty music, Mil,” and he grinned the full length of his capacious jaws, as he jingled his heavy purse, “ chimes away them all. I say, Mil, we had e’en as well be quiet where such golden showers can reach us.”

“ Well said, Nym,” returned the other ruffian, in an under tone ; “ one might seek far enough ere one found another such golden calf.”

"You may say so, Mil," grunted the other brute.

But this side-talk, however interesting to the speakers, seemed in no way agreeable to the pedler's impatience, and he briefly interrupted it, by demanding in a more authoritative tone,

"None of your mumblings, devils, lest I send you both to perdition ere your time. Why do you stand there, villains—go, scour the city, and bring me these traitors' heads, or lose my favour."

"We'll scour the city, master," returned the surly Nym; "well and truly will we—thy scout-master himself should not track their steps more cleverly than we'll do it; but 'twill be of small use—the birds are flown."

"Not far, Nym," continued his master, "where the seekers wish to find. What, are you afraid, poltroons?—by the mass, I'll ferret them out myself, and punish them well for their perfidy."

"Thou!" grunted Mil, in a scarcely suppressed voice, "thy dastardly soul punish, indeed, save by such spirits as ours!"

“ I say, Mil,” tauntingly added his companion, as they followed after their worthy leader, “ great talkers—thou knowest what the adage says—the pitiful caitiff! but the pay, Mil, the pay—let’s e’en after him.”

And the trio moved on, and soon were their footsteps no longer audible to the anxious De Bourgh. From this conversation he plainly learnt, that Moubray’s appointment had been in part overheard, and at the same time, but for the merest accident, had nigh been more than frustrated ; whether he had, indeed, been there at the fixed hour, and left in consequence of his own delay, or whether some happy chance had made him acquainted with the betrayal of his plans, De Bourgh had yet to learn. He waited some time in his concealment, well aware of the crafty movements of the royal ruffian, ere he dared to quit it—not that his noble soul would have shrunk from any encounter, but that so much depended upon himself and his extremest wariness—and then stealing slowly from his hiding-place, and cautiously reconnoitring the street, now as quiet and secluded as night and

darkness could make it, he passed stealthily along, almost expecting at each step that some fresh difficulty might await him.

He had now gained the upper end of the street, and was on the point of turning into the market-place, when some one pulled his sleeve ; he turned sharply round, expecting none other but that some violence was at hand, when, to his great surprise, he perceived Lord Moubray at his side.

“ Good heavens, Neville !” he exclaimed, for the moment overcome with astonishment, “ how have you found me ?”

“ Those who seek earnestly,” returned the baron, “ ought to find ; I have waited long and anxiously enough.”

“ *You* waited ?” exclaimed De Bourgh, almost doubting his assertion ; “ why, Neville, I have been seeking you for at least an hour.”

“ That, too, I know,” returned Moubray, “ I saw you, indeed, pass down the street, but that very instant I had received a mysterious caution to avoid the meeting, as also to warn

you from it; and ere I could follow you, a certain gang of ruffians hastened towards me, and I was glad to conceal myself in the first corner I could find."

"'Twas as well, Neville, that thou didst so conceal thyself, or thou wouldest have had little need of any future hiding-place; our meeting and its purpose have been betrayed."

"So this tells me," pointing to a scroll which he held in his hand, "though how it reached me, or from whence the caution, I cannot divine; no one, that I am aware of, knows of my being here; and yet it is most explicit, and most opportunely sent, too—a few moments later, and it were useless."

"'Tis opportune, indeed; had we met, our swords would have availed us nothing, we should not even have seen our foes—but what says your unknown monitor?"

"Short as was my glance," promptly replied the baron, "each syllable is deeply graven in my memory, it is simply this—"

"'Lord Moubray—this night's secret meeting is known—beware it: nor let thy friend, then,

come near the place—a bloody falcon is abroad—  
Beware!’—The scroll was brought to me by one  
closely muffled up—whether man or woman, I  
know not, though I shrewdly suspect the latter,  
who also carried a hidden light for its perusal;  
I had barely time to glance at the letters,  
when the messenger darted from me, and I was  
again alone. You passed almost that same  
moment, and I was yet too much agitated to  
follow you.”

“‘Tis indeed strange, Neville,” said De  
Bourgh, musingly; “though not on that ac-  
count a jot less to be esteemed; but as the  
caution is good, and very beneficial too, and as  
we are met in the sequel, let us at once to our  
conference.”

“With all my heart—I have seen Fitz-  
Arnulf.”

“And the result of your interview—is it  
good or bad?”

“Salisbury’s heart is with you, but I fear  
that necessity will break his proud spirit to the  
tyrant’s yoke, and lose to you his co-operation.”

“Tis impossible, Neville; I can never be-

dishonour; our plans, though not fully matured, are sufficiently ripe for instant operation, and we will forego other advantages to save such illustrious souls as thine from our enemy—and from disgrace. Three days from this, the general meeting of the confederates takes place, when our instant movements will be fully arranged. Nothing, Moubray, can frustrate our enterprise; secure of such valiant spirits, as also of sufficient money to put our force into efficient action, where can we fail? or why should any, whose heart is with us, fear to commit himself to our party—especially for such empty inducements as this faithless John can offer? Stand, then, boldly forth amongst us, Neville; if thou seekest honour it shall be thine—even wealth will await thee, when our foes shall be put down, and their rich lands pay the penalty of their treason. Hesitate not, then, Neville—thou shalt not hesitate any longer—thou art—thou must be ours.”

“De Bourgh,” exclaimed Moubray, much excited by his warm earnestness, “I will not wrong thy honest zeal by ungraciously refusing



thee: be the end what it may, with my whole heart and soul will I be your's, and not only so, but Salisbury, too, will I secure to your party."

"Ay," rejoined De Bourgh, with exultation, "now this sounds well—let but this energy continue, and success is already attained. Salisbury, however, is at best but wavering, save in his revenge; and, as even that now yields to necessity, strong and continued inducements will alone lure him to any useful co-operation."

"Trust him to my care, De Bourgh, closely will I mark him, and I will both answer for his appearance, as also for his hearty support."

"For his appearance, Neville, I can well trust thee, though for zeal in the cause I should doubt even a more earnest solicitude than thy best—be it, however, thy part to gain Salisbury from the usurper's influence; tell him his need shall be supplied, and, if possible, bring him with thee to the meeting, prepared to give us his support. I ask not more of thee—if Salisbury can refuse the arguments

then to be advanced, let our project be no longer attempted."

"Agreed, De Bourgh, agreed—so far my honour is your hostage for my hearty truth."

"Content in which, Neville, I at once proceed to apprise the rest of the leaders of the early meeting, and I may not again see thee—in thine honour, indeed, I can well trust, neither will thy discretion fail thee—if there be a weak point about thee, it is the jealous doubt which cramps thy more generous zeal."

"Fear not for me, my good fellow; if thy plans have no other risk than what any lukewarmness of mine threatens, they are secure indeed."

"Be not offended, Neville, many a good enterprise has been ruined by too prudent caution."

"But far more, De Bourgh, through over zeal—be content, however; Hugh Neville will well redeem his pledge."

"I *am* content, Neville."

And not many minutes afterwards the tall

gaunt figure of De Bourgh, muffled closely up, was stealing quickly from the city; a horse awaited him in the environs, and he was soon beyond all further notice.

## CHAPTER III.

“ Know’st thou not,  
That when the searching eye of Heaven is hid  
Behind the globe, and lights the lower world,  
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen,  
In murders, and in outrage ?”

*Richard the Second.*

WHEN the royal ruffian with his congenial associates passed on from the spot where De Bourgh was concealed, his design, notwithstanding his seeming to the contrary, was secretly to watch, in some convenient spot, for the still expected arrival of the individuals, whose declared object, and evident mystery, had so perplexed his suspicious apprehensions. He had, in fact, already bestowed himself, together

with his party, behind a blank wall, at the lower end of the street, from whence he could detect any footsteps that might pass down; when suddenly, through the dark night, he observed a light figure glide swiftly past him and instantly disappear.

Cowardice and superstition are nearly and intimately united; the same weakness that takes away the power to resist earthly perils, leaves the feeble soul doubly open to the horrors of unearthly fears. The bravest spirits, indeed, have yielded to superstitious terrors; how then could such an abject and guilty wretch as John escape their severest torture? No sooner, in answer to his hasty demand from his companions, did he learn that the figure had not been seen by them, than a strange unaccountable dread seemed to take hold of him; and pointing out to his ruffian attendants the direction in which it had appeared to pass, he commanded them instantly to follow it. The fellows were nothing loth to execute such an order, for they knew nothing of superstitious fears, and promptly leaving

their affrighted master by himself, they proceeded in the route prescribed.

That same moment, however, did the tyrant repent his hasty command. Conscience, that discarded, ill-used guide, told him of many victims of his cruelty and hate, whose spirits might haunt him, and call loudly for retribution; and though he seldom felt that secret monitor, for that riot and excess too often, and callousness almost always drowned its suggestions, yet there occasionally were moments, when left to himself, in spite of his care to guard against such a contingency, and unsupported by the presence of others, that never-dying witness would cry out, and harrow up his soul almost to mad despair.

Such a horrible torment now afflicted him to an agony of fear; his knees trembled, his teeth chattered against each other, and he looked fearfully round expecting to see he knew not what.

It was at this very moment, that he fancied he saw the same white object again approach him—dim and indistinct did it seem—scarcely

did it move—and yet it did move, slowly but directly towards him. Horror closed his eyes, though for a brief moment only were they closed—the next, fear had again opened them, and he beheld before him, so close, indeed, that even the deep darkness in which he stood hindered not his distinctly discerning it, a slight female figure, as of a young and lovely woman—it approached still nearer, and a faint, unearthly light fell upon her ghastly features, and discovered to his quivering soul, the horrible semblance of a deed of blood and murder, at which not even his callous heart could look without palsying terror. The bandage of death was round her eyes—the deadly gash seemed still fresh across her throat, and the purple stream of life still to ooze fastly from the wound—and the ruffian murderer thought that the accusing spirit of the slaughtered Anne de Yves stood before him.

Well might the wretch shudder at such a belief; the Lady Anne was the only child of the Baron of Mandeville, his dearest, sweetest treasure—the stay and support of his existence

—his only known heiress. The baron had suddenly died, and the lovely Anne was committed to the care of noble guardians—but the kingly ruffian had seen the beauteous orphan, and his soul desired her beauty, and his greedy avarice her lands ; he assumed her revenues to his own use—such, indeed, was his royal privilege during her minority, and he took the maiden under his own immediate care. But it seemed as if she withered at his very touch ; brief, indeed, was the space that she endured his protection ; ere a few months had expired, the Lady Anne was no more, her domains had passed to the crown, and the poor deserted orphan was no longer thought of.

But in the deep and dark recesses of a royal palace—recesses so dark, that cheerful light never entered, everlasting darkness ever reigned—and so deep, that pity knew not even of their existence, nor could agony penetrate to declare it—there was a fastly-fading flower, whose bloom had long since ceased—whose fragrance had passed away—and whose blanched and withered stem lay broken and desolate, as



if a storm of anguish had struck it—as if a loaded atmosphere of woe hung heavy upon it. It was, indeed, the work of anguish and of woe; a cutting frost of damnable cruelty—a ruthless tempest of horrible desolation had marred its loveliness, and changed its bright excellence into dull and pallid destruction.

Such was the unknown fate of the beauteous Anne. A devil's hand of violence had been upon her—her beauty had been snatched by an unholy and reckless spoiler, and a strange and dark vacuity had become her existence.

But even her quick decay contented not the greedy murderer. Affairs of state called him from that scene of destruction, and he cared not to leave any living evidence of his barbarity; he ordered her death—nay, to be the more certain of its fact, accompanied the ruffian minister of his will to the deed of blood.

The darkness of that inky cell was even denser, when those murderers sought it—dark, indeed, as midnight and their bloody purpose could make it. Some sudden reason, some unnatural strength had come to their victim; she

seemed to know and strove to resist their purpose. Futile effort ! Could weakness—especially such shrunken weakness as her's—oppose the determined intent of so ferocious strength ? Loud and horrible was the scream, which her soul's agony wrung from her—alas ! the cold, insensible walls might, indeed, have felt that cry and given her pity ; but those monsters' hearts—*they* could not feel it—her struggles but whetted their eager thirst for her life's blood.

Their strength soon overpowered her feeble resistance, and then—it was but a moment's work—the ferocious John quickly bound up the eyes, whose horrible glare had for a moment unnerved the savage aider of his bloody work—there was but one gash—quick as the lightning's gleam was that gash—and all was still—the struggles had ceased—there were no longer cries—no longer agony—and the once beauteous and matchless Anne, the pride of beauty, the glory of loveliness, was nought but a livid and mangled corse, disgusting and horrible even to look upon.

Why did that ruthless murderer then so

violently start, and his coward soul tremble within him? The accusing blood had covered his person, and that last dying wail seemed echoed by unearthly tones—a single shriek, shuddering as horror, and piercing as despair, burst for one instant through those secret caverns, and then died away.

The ruffians looked at each other aghast, large drops of fear hung on their pale foreheads, and starting to their feet, they darted from their bleeding victim, and rushed to less appalling horrors. But though the ready water soon removed those outward stains, and the goblet of intoxication for a time drowned the memory of that hideous murder, still did that cry haunt the tyrant's soul, still did that accusing blood dash over him: his very soul seemed dyed in gore, and his sight tintured with its hue; even in the midst of revels and debauchery did it affright him—from the most reckless profaneness, and the maddest excess, would he suddenly start with dread, as that bloody scene rushed before him, and that fearful sign seemed again to stain his trembling hands.

It was not that this deed of murder was more cruel or more sanguinary than many others, which had resulted from his ruthless passions, that John felt it so horribly ; but that he had been thus accidentally made an actual worker in the deed.

On other occasions, it had been but a command—a mere word of mouth—a breath had been all, and the deed was finished ; but here his own hand had repressed the victim's struggles, his own hand had held her for the blow : and when his ruffian attendant wavered for that look of supplicating agony which then flashed from her tortured eyes, it was *he* that had bound up those pleading intelligences—even he, who had hung upon their beauty, and whom that beauty had lured to her destruction—even he could look upon them, when brutal inhumanity shrunk from their gaze—it was his hand that had stopped their entreaty—his hand that had shut out their light for ever.

Time passed on, but the memory of that deed still continued ; age, though it might perhaps deaden its actual lineaments, gave to it unreal

features, that but racked him with a bitterer torment; and the scene, once acted, now appeared to him in a thousand torturing forms. He strove not to think of it, and in his mad excesses, and the various scenes to which his station introduced him, found occasional forgetfulness—but can the murderer ever find peace? can the destroyer of human life ever know rest? No—the blood of his victim called out for vengeance, and her spirit still seemed to haunt his steps.

Well might he tremble, when the semblance of the slaughtered Anne seemed to stand before him, and thus in midnight and solitary darkness to confront his path.

It was, indeed, no unreal vision that he saw, it came nearer and nearer—that fatal bandage still was there—that horrible gash seemed still to pour with blood—and that unearthly light to grow brighter and brighter; and a loud piercing shriek—his blood curdled at the well remembered sound—burst on his ears; and then—but the murderer saw not, heard not more; horror had overpowered him, and forcibly

closing his ears he sunk to the ground, and buried himself in his cloak. Nor did he stir from his covert, nor dare one single glance more, until footsteps approached, and the harsh rough voices of his associate ruffians fell sweeter than any music on his ears.

Then, indeed, he looked up—fearful was that look—but the vision was no more—courage returned, shame roused him from his abject position, and, starting to his feet, he prepared to meet his fellows, if not with calmness, at least, with some semblance of composure.

A sullen peevishness succeeded to his previous abasement, and which his wonted wariness failed to conceal; he evinced, indeed, his mental disorder in so glaring a manner, as to lay himself open in no trifling degree to the gibes and insulting remarks of his ruffians, who spared not to each other their freest observations on his cowardice.

But either John heard not their jeers, or it was more suitable to his present plans not to appear to notice them; he hurried quickly away, and avoiding all public avenues, soon, perhaps

as much by accident as design, found himself at Roger Mallet's habitation. He instantly paused, and for some moments carefully reconnoitered the house ; there was, however, neither sound nor sign to assist his scrutiny, and failing to detect any probability of the miser's presence, he forthwith demanded admittance, at the same time, observing to his attendants—

“ The old wretch's tact shall not save him this time ; we'll ferret out his gold, or the fault shall not be ours—but keep you back, varlets, such grim-looking devils would frighten a far more daring heart than this old curmudgeon's, and force will do nothing ; I'll signal you, when I've coaxed the fox from his cover.”

The miscreants had hardly yet withdrawn, when the ancient hag, who was, indeed, but little behind her wily master in wariness, cautiously protruded her head from the grated window, and demanded, in no gracious accents, the cause of this unseasonable disturbance.

“ Tish only me, Misdresh Deborah,” humbly returned the seeming pedler ; “ only poor

Tavid de Jew, wid de shekels for your goot master, Misdresh Deborah—mush monish, very heavy monish, indeed—Oh, tear ! make haste and open me the door.”

But neither his earnestness, nor his seeming fatigue, nor yet his errand, appeared to move the old dame to any granting of his request ; but brief and rude was her denial, and her manner even less promising :

“ Master’s not at home,”—her speaking tones were not less forbidding than her words—“ so ye maun e’en keep the money :” and, as she spoke, she was speedily withdrawing within her fortress.

“ But, my goot Misdresh Deborah,” quickly rejoined the impostor, fearful of losing the old damsel’s attention ; “ de shekels may be lost, and den what would my goot friend say ? Now don’t be so hard-hearted to a poor wearied traveller, Misdresh Deborah, but let me in.”

“ I’ll none let thee in,” returned the unyielding hag ; “ I’m rather too old a bird to be caught with such light chaff as that ; I tell thee, Master



Mallet is not at home, and I'm not going to trust myself into a stranger's hands, for that he says he has gold."

"Gentle, lovely creature," the wily suppliant shrugged up his shoulders at the misnomer; "fear not poor Tavid, nor doubt his truth—turn, oh! turn, doze angry eyes away, dat even now sparkle in dis midnight gloom, and look more kindly on me—oh! Misdresh Deborah—oh!"

But not even his so fluent gallantry seemed to soften Misdresh Deborah's determination; for once, lovely woman was deaf even to the voice of flattery.

"I'm none going to be tricked by your blarney, Master David, however ye may think it; one word's as good as a hundred—master is not here, and even, had he not cautioned me otherwise, I'm not going to let a stranger into his house at this time of night: so ye may e'en take yourself off, as soon as ye please; for talk ye, if ye like, till morn, I'll heed ye not."

"But pray ye, Misdresh Deborah," continued the persevering pedler; "dou kind

angel—dou sweet lily of de valley, at least, take de shekels—monish will not hurt you—ah ! monish is very goot—and Master Mallet likes de monish, Misdresh Deborah.”

“ Like enough he may,” rejoined the Abigail, though in little softened tone; “and sure enough he would like to have it too, were he here—but he’s not here, nor will he be here for at least a week to come, and I’ll none touch the money myself—so the sooner ye’re off the better. You’ll find I’m none of your daft women, none of your silly fools that don’t know the moon from a green cheese; and that ye shall find, Master David—so take yourself off, and give us no more of your gibbering.”

“ But kind, gentle, Misdresh Deborah,” hastily rejoined the impatient suitor, at the same time adding, in a side tone, the maledictory epithet, “thou cursed hag !—pray tell me den where I may find dy goot master, dat I may go to him and give him de monish.”

“ I know none where he’s gone, not I ; he’ll be back after six days, as I said before ; but I’m none going to tell ye more, so ye need no

expect it. I know quite enough of the maxims of your great prince, the sapient Solomon, to remember, that ‘a close mouth keepeth a wise head,’ and, depend on’t, mine shan’t lose its character through too much wind.”

“Oh no—most excellent wisdom,” replied the still unyielding Jew, not slightly amused with her easy conceit, however his purpose might be thereby delayed, “no one cout doubt it—de queen of Sheba wash a fool to de wary Misdresh Deborah. Ah! how well wash she named after de prophetess of Israel.”

“I tell thee what, Master David,” interrupted the impatient and unyielding termagant, “an thou thinkest to come over me with thy jargon, thou’rt woefully deceived; so march thee off, or it may chance to be worse for thee. I believe, indeed, thou’rt nought but an impostor, for Master Mallet never deals with thy sect—in fact, he hates a Jew, as much as a Jew does pork; nor will even convenience make one palatable to him. Once more therefore, I say, take thyself off, or I’ll shew thee a somewhat decisive argument;” the

old damsel at the same time produced, through the grating, a tolerably formidable arblast, or crossbow, well charged with a massive quarrel ; “ if, however, thou art really honest, come this day se’night, and Master Mallet will see thee.”

“ But one word more, cruel Misdresh Deborah,” at the same time the prudent pedler hastily retreated beyond the supposed range of her prowess ; “ may not poor Tavid come before den ?—a week, Misdresh Deborah, is a very long time to keep de shekels—not one day sooner, Misdresh Deborah ?”

“ No, not one day sooner, Mashder Tavid,” the old beldam mocked his Hebrew accent, “ Master Mallet has other matters on his hands till then.”

The pedler started, but still keeping up his assumed character, as well as preserving his self-command, he carelessly rejoined — “ Just for one moment longer hear me, Misdresh Deborah—indeed, indeed you wrong me, and Master Mallet, too, may lose his monish, which he so much wants.”

The old dame seemed to hesitate, a change

to take place in her proceedings, of which the wily suppliant instantly availed himself—

“Now do, most kind Misdresh Deborah, let me in—or at least take de monish—you *must* know how much it is wanted—and—”

“Hark ye, Master David,” interrupted the prudent safeguard, “if thou really be no impostor, I’ll tell thee what thou must do—I cannot let thee in, for I have sworn, that the first who shall enter these walls shall be Master Mallet on his return; keep, therefore, thy shekels until the *fifth* day from this—Master Mallet will then be here—but must not for the world be known to be here to any other soul. Only that thy gold may be wanted, I had not spoken to thee so openly—mind, therefore, thou art prudent, or, if there be no other hand to punish thee, mine shall do it.”

“Fear me not,” returned the pedler, in a thoughtful and less disguised tone, “I’ll fail nought to catch the miser.”

“Ha!” violently screamed out the affrighted hag, on detecting the changed tone of his voice, “art thou, indeed, a cheat—an impostor? Fool

that I was"—and the same moment the clang of the bow was heard, and the missile flew with so unerring aim, that had not the wily impostor darted suddenly on one side, he would indeed have had cause to repent his inadvertency. As it was, the bolt just missed him; and, agitated as well by his so narrow escape, as alarmed for the fresh danger which the instant sound of the redrawing of the bow seemed to threaten, he waited no further parley, but promptly secured his retreat, well content to have escaped on such lucky terms.

"Would we had the old hag," he exclaimed to his attendant ruffians, as rage quickly succeeded to his previous fear; "by the relics of the holy Becket, her withered hand had never drawn another bow!"

"And dost thou govern Israel?" whined out the pious sembling Nym, who, in the heterogeneous compound of his faith, had learned as much of Christian, as of Infidel and Mahometan tenets, nor was at any time backward to quote the sacred scriptures when his purpose was thereby answered: "Arise, oh! King, and

let thine heart be merry—I will give thee this Philistine into thine hand.”

“Softly, softly, my good Nym,” returned his more wary patron, “though my vengeance be delayed, it shall not therefore fall the less heavily—in the bitterness of my present soul, indeed, would I tear the cursed witch asunder, and her death-screams would be music to my ears; but she is well fenced in her fortress, and force must be avoided—patience, therefore, my good Nym, and thou shalt see and well acknowledge her speedy punishment—deeper uses, too, are to be answered by the delay.”

“As thou pleasest,” grunted the ruffian, on no occasion relishing any mitigation, or even delay of punishment; “hadst thou let me, I had even now stopped her triumph.”

“But thou knowest, Nym,” tauntingly added his fellow brute, “kingly purposes travel a jot less swiftly than our straight-forward deeds—such mean wretches as thee and me, Nym, would well execute, ere the royal mind had dared the deed.”

“Cease, minion,” petulantly exclaimed his

master, at the same moment bursting with fury at the fellow's impudence, and cowed into submission by the dread of losing his adherence—"cease, or by God's teeth, this hand shall teach thee respect."

"Nym," insultingly interjected the other ruffian, at the same time pointing to the tyrant's hand, which, in the feeling of the moment, he had clenched in a threatening attitude—"Nym—that fair white woman's hand—"

"*That* teach, eh, Mil?" returned the other with the same audacious effrontery; and a sneering smile finished the sentence.

John watched the scornful snort wherewith the sullen Mil assented to his comrade's insolence, but though it was as venom to his sight, still he dared not resent their mockings—for his coward soul knew no safety but in their hireling fidelity.

Degrading however as was such a submission, his debased soul felt it not, save with the petulant sullenness wherewith a child would resent the baulking of some favourite wish; he



betook himself to his wonted sulks, and hastily led the way to the royal palace.

Once—but it was only once, and brief was the inquiry—did he ask himself, as his hurried step betrayed his uneasy thoughts, where was the soul of the Plantagenets? whether the lion-hearted and noble Richard had indeed sprung from the same origin as he, and wondered whence his own trembling, dastard spirit had descended to him; but it was too galling an inquiry even to his reckless soul, and, arrived at the palace, he quickly quenched its impression in a deep goblet of potent wine.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ There is no darkness like the cloud of mind  
On grief’s vain eye—the blindest of the blind !  
Which may not—dare not see—but turns aside  
To blackest shade, nor will endure a guide !”

*The Corsair.*

WHEN the disconsolate Maud recovered from the swoon into which, on the preceding evening, the announcement of her ruthless fate had sunk her, (the timely, though unknown aid of the Princess Eleanor had been the means of her restoration,) she looked wildly round, as if unwitting of her real state, and doubtful that so cruel destruction had indeed come upon her.

But how momentary was that doubt ! The full conviction of her wretchedness at once burst upon her, and the desolation of a broken heart, to one, in whom feeling was as a whirlwind's tempest, too impetuous to be restrained, was fully felt by that poor victim of disappointed affections. Her very soul had been wrapped up in that one single promise, and she had clung to it, as the only rock of her confidence—her only wish :—to be happy, nay, to exist, seemed but there—the wind had blown against it—the storm of doubts and fears had agitated it, but she had clung the more madly to its support—even against hope had she hoped, and when despair seemed to hang over her in a thousand fearful shapes, still had she held to the one poor, withering possibility of better things, which the intense wish of her heart alone suggested to her—but even from that last faint grasp was she now dashed, and what a sweeping sea then rushed over her !

But footsteps approached—too well did she discern them, for too sweet had been their music on her ears ; quick as her thoughts had

passed across her mind, far quicker was the movement wherewith she started to her feet and hurried from the apartment.

Little, however, of peace did the quiet and seclusion of her own chamber bring to her, for wild and vehement anguish there accompanied her; and then followed that dull, changeless apathy of sorrow that feels too deeply for any outward expression—too overwhelming for the mild soothing vent of tears.

The night passed away, the morning came, the glorious sun arose—though not to her were its cheering beams, and his declining rays still found her in that same lost, fearful despair.

She felt not hunger, wanted not sleep—that anguish of her grief was to her both.

It was now again night, a night as dark and wild as her own soul, when she was suddenly roused from the stupor in which she lay: some one knocked at her chamber door; she would have denied admittance, but the joyous maiden, the Lady Thérèse, had already entered the apartment, and announced to her that the gentle Isabella required her presence.

It was with almost horror that she learnt the, to her then feelings, ungracious summons.

“Say, dearest Therèse,” she entreated, with an earnestness that strangely contrasted with the wild wandering of her manner, “say that I am indisposed—indeed, Therèse, I am very, very ill.”

“Poor dear girl,” returned the pitying maiden, “thou seemest indeed afflicted, and myself will well excuse thee to our kind mistress—but what is thy ailment, Maud?—and wherefore has not the leech already been with thee?”

“’Tis useless, dear Therèse,”—it was almost a groan wherewith she spoke—“my hurt is far beyond the leech’s power—too deep for any human aid.”

“Say not so, dearest, but tell me what ails thee, Maud? Hide not thy hurt from me, nor let our gentle lady ask in vain what keeps her favourite Maud from her duty.”

But the maiden was speechless; again and again did the sympathizing Therèse repeat her anxious inquiry, but still was the poor Maud

silent—she could not speak her griefs; and her trembling agitation so convulsed her, that the pitying Thérèse, alarmed to witness it, rose suddenly from her knees at the bed-side of her friend, and hurried quickly from the apartment.

Maud rejoiced that she was again alone; it seemed a relief to her harrowed feelings to be left to herself, and from mere exhaustion she had sunk into a gentle doze, when her half-conscious senses became aware that some sweet spirit watched over her couch—she opened her listless eyes—the pitying Isabella was that guardian spirit. The maiden seemed as well troubled as distressed by her presence—for some moments she understood not fully her kind solicitude—then hastily rising, she looked imploringly at her royal friend, and beholding the earnest sympathy that marked her features, and the ready arms that waited to support her, she sprung to her embrace, and buried her face in her bosom.

It was long ere she spoke, nor did the queen seek to interrupt the silence, for it seemed to

her that the tide of feeling, if left to itself, might overflow the banks of that rushing sea, and give relief. At length she looked up, and in a voice of trembling emotion, and whose tones were deep and sepulchral, she wildly exclaimed—

“It is past—hope is gone—for ever gone ! Oh ! gracious, dearest lady, let not poor Maud be entirely forgotten ; sometimes think of her and of her fond attachment.”

“*Sometimes* think of thee, my sweet Maud !” repeated the queen, tenderly beholding the blanched cheeks and sunken eyes of her favorite ; “poor drooping flower ! can I *ever* forget thee ? Oh, talk not thus melancholy, Maud, nor yield so entirely to thy fears—cheer up, dear girl, and yet let hope support thee.”

“Alas, alas ! dearest Madam, there is no hope now for poor Maud ; a ruthless destruction is upon her—death the one only desire of her soul !”

“I must not listen to thee, Maud,” quickly replied the queen, “nor can I suffer thee to give way to this depression ; is thy mistress’

friendship so worthless, and her kind offices, so faithfully tendered, entirely without promise to thee?"

"Thy friendship, royal, beloved lady, is as comfort—the only comfort Maud now feels;" the maiden shook her head, her voice even more deeply faltered, as she added, "but thy offices, kind, condescending as they are, can never avail me more."

"What meanest thou, Maud?" anxiously demanded Isabella; "wherefore thy extreme depression—'tis impossible the youth can have slighted thy fond preference?—Nay, thou must tell me, child—fear not, thou speakest to one that will both feel for and pity thee; keep, therefore, nothing from me—the boy loves thee not, Maud?"

The maiden hid her burning face more closely in her mistress' bosom—she could not speak: the virgin's timid modesty and her offended pride kept her without the power to declare the ungrateful truth.

"It is impossible, Maud," continued the gentle Isabella, willing to spare the poor girl



any needless pain, and at the same time she kissed her burning forehead. "Vex not thyself thus, child, De Bourgh *dare* not do it—he loves too well our favour to dare to slight our favorite."

"Nor has he, dearest lady," at length sobbed out the agitated maiden; "slight? oh! no, not slight—there was no unkindness—no, no, 'twas all tenderest sympathy—all pity, but yet despair to poor Maud, for alas, alas! he never can be mine; his heart—it is already given."

"So young, Maud," exclaimed the queen, in great surprise, "and yet so old in love? Impossible, my poor child, he but deceives thee, or thy fond fancies alarm thee with unreal fears. Cheer up, Maud, all shall yet be well; thy mistress will see thee happy, or her friendly offices shall fail, for the first time, of their desired result."

"They are useless, dearest Madam, to me worse than useless; I know—I feel that no beam of happiness will again shine upon me, and all I ask is, that I may die in peace."

"Do not pain thy loving mistress, Maud,

by this obstinacy of grief—at least look as if you felt her intended kindness.”

“ Oh, gracious Madam ! judge not your poor Maud unkindly, in my inmost soul do I feel your sympathy ; but not its most earnest solicitude can make even a show of hope to light up these hapless features—alas, no—my fate is as fixed as it is wretched.”

“ But yet, Maud, if but for my sake—thy friend Isabella’s sake, arrest thy judgment till I have seen the youth.”

“ Oh ! no—no,” hurriedly interrupted the maiden, “ let him not hate me.”

“ Thou knowest mine already assurance, my sweet girl, nor shouldst thou doubt my prudence ; but it were worse than unkindness in one who so professes herself thy friend, to leave thee to this misery, and not stretch out her hand to save thee. Even, for my own sake too, must I learn what means this seeming contradiction in the page—’tis seldom, Maud, that so young a stripling makes so early gift of his affections. Thou saidst, I think, that his

heart was given to another?—At least, so I understood thee to be his words.”

The maiden had seemed confused, as if uncertain of the entire correctness of the queen’s impression, and she hesitated not slightly as she replied, “ Not such his *words*, Madam—my *belief* of them, indeed, that was such : ‘ Some impassable barrier’—what else indeed could that mean?—and those indelible words were those he declared to me.”

“ Ha !” the queen seemed perplexed, “ ‘ impassable barrier ?’ ’tis strange—inexplicable too—I like it not, Maud—I fear the boy is not the simple youth we took him for—indeed, child, it looks not well—I must forthwith fathom the mystery. Do thou, dear girl, compose thyself, and wait my prompt scrutiny, I will not keep thee in any needless suspense.”

And as she spoke, she tenderly raised the feeble maiden from her arms, and laying her gently on the couch, hastened from the apartment with the eager step of one who hurries to secure some anxious purpose.

Isabella, indeed, had far greater foundation for her doubts of Albert's truth and simplicity, than the evident contradiction which the maiden's communication seemed to suggest against her former estimate of his character. It was perhaps seldom that John, in his confidences, passed the close circle of the reckless ministers of his will; or even suffered to appear on the subtle mask which his policy kept ever smiling on his countenance, the black venom of his soul. But whether from the mere inconsistency of his character, or that Albert, being the queen's own particular page, he sought to weaken her regard for him by the doubt of his truth, he had been to her in no way reserved in his expressions of his believed conviction of the youth's treachery—convictions from his spies' secret information, so deeply rooted, that not even her warm zeal in his behalf, and her disbelief of the imputation, could remove them, and he only waited further facts of his dishonesty, when his quick vengeance would at once fall upon him.

It was, indeed, this very conviction, excited

perhaps by De Laci's jealous falsehoods, that had subjected Albert to John's fearful ordeal on the preceding night, when the youth's apparent earnestness, and the probability of his assisting his plans, by bringing back De Bourgh to his duty, had for the time, at least, delivered him from intended punishment.

Notwithstanding, however, the empty profession of his favour, the King's suspicions still continued, and, as a natural consequence, the intrusive doubts, which the kind Isabella strove not to indulge, each day grew stronger and stronger as they continued to be suggested to her, until at length she was compelled to admit the possibility of the page's insincerity, if not of his actual treason. When, therefore, the mystery which appeared in his declaration to Maud was named to her, it seemed so strongly to corroborate her existing doubts, that her mind no longer resisted the certain conviction of the youth's duplicity; and anxious, as well to unburthen herself of the ungracious discovery, as also to gain further proofs of his baseness, which she felt that John was well pre-

pared to give her, she hastily sought an interview with her royal consort.

As, however, she was passing along the private gallery, which led to the King's apartment, and which was only open to the higher members of the royal household, her steps were suddenly arrested by the prostrate figure of the jester, Phœdrus, who trembling as if with fear and horror, seemed scarcely conscious of her presence.

Anger at his presumption, and surprise at his extreme agitation, were her first feelings on beholding him: surprise, however, soon preponderated, for the jester seemed lost in an agony of terror, nor was it till after an often repeated demand, at first, of harsh severity, but soon, from the evident excess of his alarm, changed into pity, that she learnt that he had been compelled to the spot by a horrible spectre, whom even yet his tortured sight fancied he beheld.

Isabella was not free from superstitious apprehensions—the fearful starts and midnight terrors of her guilty husband had indeed too

often affrighted her, nor had her timid spirit resisted the baneful influence of his mental horrors ; and she guessed—it might, indeed, be a surer knowledge—that, if ever an unhallowed grave rendered up its murdered victims to torment the souls of their destroyers, many graves might now be open, and accusing spirits fill the wailing air with the fearful cry of vengeance on the wretch, whom a cursed bond had made her husband.

The trembling Isabella therefore looked fearfully round in the direction where the jester's eyes seemed so intently fixed—but there was nothing. She turned quickly back for an explanation—the man seemed to be eagerly listening, as if afraid to catch some dreaded sound ; rapidly as her own movement, he started to an attitude of extreme terror, and pointing to the same spot to which he had before directed her attention, almost screamed out in ill-suppressed horror—“ See, see—there—again that bloody sign ;” and the same instant he hid his face between his knees.

Isabella again looked back, as the cold chilly

drops stood on her brow, and her shuddering sight seemed already to shrink from the horrible appearance that awaited her ; but still there was nothing, nothing even to alarm her most timid fear—all was still, the lamps burnt brightly, and the cheerful arras that lined the gallery seemed to mock her terrors. But that same instant did a rushing sound pass behind her at the farther end of the gallery ; Isabella started quickly round, but she could still see nothing—there was no longer a rushing sound, but, in place thereof, the noise as of a closing door, and then all was again silent.

The queen stood as one oppressed with fearful astonishment ; the jester seemed transfixed with supernatural awe, he still listened with deepest attention, betokening by his manner that his royal mistress should follow his example.

But no further sound interrupted the breathless stillness which had ensued to that unknown noise ; the queen looked to Phœdrus for some explanation of the mystery, but the jester's manner seemed almost to require the same satisfaction at her hands.



“What hast thou beheld?” at length demanded the queen, some little recovered, though still not slightly under the influence of her fears — “What was the bloody sign of which thou spakest?” and as she spoke, she again glanced fearfully to where Phœdrus had pointed.

“Oh ! your grace,” returned the jester, his teeth still chattering against each other for terror, “there has been a bloody deed—it has been a murderous act—Heaven preserve your majesty—horrible must have been the blow—even as its image is terrible. Ha ! what was that ?”

He started violently, and again seemed to listen with trembling awe ; but there was no sound nor sight, and the queen sought to reassure his courage, by observing—

“There is nothing, Phœdrus ; alarm not yourself therefore, but tell me the full cause of your fright ; your fears may have deceived you.”

“Ah ! your majesty,” returned the jester, mournfully shaking his head ; “poor Phœdrus makes not trouble unnecessarily for himself,

enough of sorrow is his lot ; but if the graves of the destroyed will yawn, and if the dead will speak, Phœdrus must—he cannot but listen.”

“And what did the dead declare to thee, Phœdrus ?”—the queen spoke impatiently—“tell me instantly, I am in no humour for delay.”

“I may not, gracious lady,” the jester replied in a solemn tone, and looking fearfully up, he added in almost a whisper, “I am restrained—a stronger power than even thy royal pleasure shuts my lips : oh ! no—were it not even so, would I curse thy gentle spirit with the horrible recital ? No, ’tis too horrible for aught so good as the virtuous Isabella.”

But good and virtuous as the queen was, and though she almost feared to learn the horrible tale his manner seemed to indicate, her female curiosity urged her to demand it.

“Phœdrus,” she hurriedly returned, “I must and will know thy alarm ; on pain of my displeasure, therefore, as well as the punishment of this your insolent intrusion, where you well know it is forbidden you to come, at

once declare to me the particulars of your terror, if but in excuse for your boldness."

The jester seemed both perplexed and alarmed by the queen's determination, he still hesitated, though more as if at a loss how to evade satisfying her curiosity, than from the influence of any supernatural restraint; he seemed indeed to estimate sensitively enough the consequences of her anger, and to feel the real offence, which, by his intrusion in the gallery, and especially at such an hour, he had committed; but still other considerations appeared to decide his evident purpose of withholding the information. To gain time, however, to devise some plan of effecting his design, without either betraying it to the queen, or increasing her displeasure, the wily jester abruptly changing the tone of his voice, began to chaunt in the wonted manner of his office—

"The air hath knowledge—the deep telleth of wisdom—from the bowels of the earth there is understanding. A parable is a dark saying—but what if the dead speak it?—a mystery is as a hidden light—but what if the grave declare it?"

"Peace, Phœdrus," impatiently interrupted the queen; "peace with thy jargon—simpler words will do, the plain fact will suffice."

But Phœdrus seemed scarcely to hear her words, so earnestly did he appear lost in some secret anxiety. The queen too, suddenly started, for that same moment, at the extremity of the gallery where the rushing sound had before been heard, a door was cautiously opened and almost instantly closed.

"Ha!" quickly exclaimed the queen, "what is that? it cannot surely be the Princess Eleanor's chamber—what can disturb her at this hour of night?"

She hastily quitted the jester ere the words had escaped her lips, and hurried along the gallery.

Phœdrus looked anxiously after her, saw her pass instantly into the chamber, and then waiting not further, promptly hastened from his dubious situation, well pleased, if thereby he but gained a delay for the explanation of his terror.

## CHAPTER V.

"Come, pledge me fairly.

Away, away ! there's blood upon the brim.

Will it then never, never sink in the earth ?"

*Manfred.*

THE queen found little satisfaction in her scrutiny of the princess' chamber ; both the princess and her attendant were fast asleep, and every thing around them as still and silent as death itself. She wished to have minutely examined the apartment, for so satisfied was she of the correctness of her belief, that she would rather have questioned the fact of having heard the noise at all, than the spot whence it had issued ; but the fear of disturbing the

princess hesitated her purpose, while the unsatisfying stillness around her, each moment so added to her trepidation, and increased her belief that it was no earthly agent which had occasioned her alarm, that ere many moments had passed, so far from prosecuting her wish, she almost hesitated to look around her. Her mysterious apprehensions soon overpowered her feeble courage, and yielding to her weakness, she quickly hurried from the spot, and sought, by the jester's presence, to dissipate her fears.

But Phœdrus had already effected his retreat, and Isabella, annoyed and disappointed at his disappearance—for to her present mind, even his half-witted jargon would have been a relief—stood for some moments irresolute how to proceed, and almost trembling for the dread of encountering some fresh horror.

It was at this very instant that her eyes, by mere accident, rested on a door at the extremity of the gallery, not far from that of the princess, and which was supposed to have been there placed, for mere uniformity's sake;

she fancied that it moved, and despite her fears, her mind's excitement urged her to examine whether it had indeed moved, or it was but a delusion of her disordered sight that had made it so appear to do.

She hastily approached it and taking hold of the latch, drew it towards her ; to her extreme astonishment it yielded to the touch, though its rusty hinges bespoke the little use to which it had been applied. Her surprise was in no way lessened, when she discovered that it opened into a narrow passage, evidently, from the dust and cobwebs, not often intruded upon.

Isabella's first feelings on the discovery, caused her to shrink back from this secret gallery ; she eyed it indeed with fearful anxiety, but still, notwithstanding the thousand strange surmises, which perplexed, and still further excited her, she dared not even to think of penetrating into its interior.

But when, as she stood still within the portal, and became accustomed to its silence, and turned over in her mind to what it might

lead, and what secrets it might declare ; and when, as by continued reflection, she convinced herself that the strange rushing noise, and her consequent alarm, had been caused by no more mysterious means than this very door, as moved by the wind, it jarred to and fro on its grating hinge ; her superstitious fears seemed gradually to disperse—for she heeded little the jester's words—her resolution came back, and curiosity to discover to what this secret passage led, as also the hope of satisfying many strange doubts and horrible apprehensions to which the king's midnight terrors had given rise, so urged her to the attempt, that with a boldness almost beyond herself, she snatched up a lamp and at once passed into the gallery, cautiously closing the door, lest any chance should betray it to any further notice.

Her first glance shewed her that it was of no great extent, probably devised for some secret espionage of those days of violence and wrong, if not for the more ruthless purposes of tyranny and oppression ; the thick heavy door almost defied scrutiny, for it sounded as mas-



sive as the walls themselves, and the passage, contrived within the apparently solid stone, seemed secure from even a suspicion of its existence.

How it had been thus strangely left open, was as complete a mystery, as was the use and termination of the narrow passage along which she so warily crept. She sought indeed, ere she trusted each advancing step, to be well informed to what it led her, and to guard, by minutest caution, against any sudden alarm or probable danger ; but nothing appeared in any way to disturb her, save her own existing apprehensions, and they grew gradually less troublesome, as she became more reconciled to the gloomy stillness, and her excitement drew her farther and farther along.

She had not proceeded many paces, when the passage abruptly terminated at a narrow spiral staircase ; her courage here failed her, she descended indeed a single step, but that was all ; in spite of her curiosity, and the existing excitement of her spirits, they no longer urged her on ; fear and hesitation kept her motionless,

and she stood lost in strange wonder, neither daring to advance, nor attempting to retire from a spot, which seemed to command the deepest secrets.

It was at this moment, that a low groan reached her, close to where she stood; she started violently round, scarcely able to repress the ready scream, which her terror forced from her; but there was no one to be seen, no living thing save herself seemed to be in that hidden solitude. A cold, clammy shudder came over her, she listened in awful dread—the groan was repeated—her ready ear soon directed her to where it issued, but still there was no object to be discerned; and trembling with horror, she was nigh falling, when her worst terror was opportunely dispelled, or at least changed into a less appalling one, by the well known accents of her husband's voice, as the compunctuous visitings of his conscience seemed to torture him to cry out, in the believed privacy of his closet:—

“Will this bloody stain never pass away, and not even the deep grave shut up that fear-

ful cry? Oh! curse, curse on my coward soul to have conjured up this racking torment."

And an even deeper groan marked the extremity of his mental abasement.

Isabella shuddered as she thought of the horrible crimes that must have produced that cry, and remembered the tie that united her to so terrible a being; she looked eagerly in the direction whence his words had reached her, and soon discovered that the termination of the short passage, which led to the staircase on which she stood, was only thinly cased up with plaister, a portion of which had been removed, and thereby was laid open the wainscoting of the royal closet, where John's most secret and most murderous purposes were too generally devised.

Isabella quickly put down her lamp and examined further, for the brighter light, which burned within the closet, soon betrayed to her several crevices in the boards, through which she could readily distinguish what was there passing. Curiosity, had there been no intenser feeling, would have led her to look through

them, but with what an eager anxiety did she gaze—even extremest curiosity were tame to the earnestness wherewith she strained her sight to gain every feature of that unknown—forbidden—dreaded chamber.

John sat as one oppressed with anguish, and distracted with fear. Again and again did he strike his clenched fist to his forehead, as if the violence of the blow were relief to the fever of his brain,—then he looked fearfully around him, as if he thought that some of the many victims of his cruelty would start up before him, or that accusing spirit which had that night so horribly affrighted him would again confront him, and that bloody sign again curdle his heart's blood with terror—and then a deep hollow groan burst from him—the grave might have breathed that groan, so deep and hollow was it—and he again wildly struck his burning brain, as if the torture of his thoughts were madness to him.

The brute Jamy sat opposite to him, his chin leaning upon the table, and apparently fast asleep; although his almost opened eyes;

as if in sleep still upon the watch, seemed to contradict the evidence which the guttural snorts that accompanied his heavy breathings declared of such a condition.

The ruffian's snorings seemed to annoy his royal patron. John suddenly pushed the table on which he rested with much violence against him, and with an oath commanded him to desist.

Nym instantly jumped up, his widely parted eyes rolled confusedly about for a moment or two, as if they would have started even further from his pointed temples, and then quickly recollecting himself, he growled his indignation at the disturbance in no measured terms.

... "Cease, you brute!" demanded John, impatient of the fellow's insolence, "or, by Heaven, I'll strike thee dead."

... "What, would'st murder me?" bitterly returned the ruffian, the venom of his soul at the same moment tinging the smile that accompanied his inquiry; "hast thou not already shed blood enough? Will not the death of the good and lovely suffice, that thou should'st stain thine hand with aught so vile as the black

life-stream of a devil like me? Look, king; still is the deep stain there—hast thou so soon forgotten that accusing shriek?”

“Hush, Nym, hush—” agitatedly interrupted the king, at once softened into submission by the extremity of his fear—“Speak not of that; for God’s sake, stir not up that horrible remembrance—hush, Nym—didst thou not hear a noise?—The very air to-night seems teeming with horrors, and hell itself to send forth its fiends to torment me—there again—what is that?—surely thou too must hear it.”

“Not I i’ faith,” sullenly returned the ruffian, as if in no humour to listen to the king’s needless fancies, “I hear nought but the moaning of the wind—’tis only thine own needless fears that disturb thee.”

“Ah! Nym,” rejoined his master, a deep sigh prefacing the remark; “’tis well for thee thou hast such nerves—would I could be as careless, Nym.”

“’Tis all the Malvesic, oh! king”—as Jamy spoke, he seized a goblet from off the table, and quickly drained its contents—“all this:

god-like juice, your majesty—makes a brave man as it were a Sampson in strength, and e'en rouses the trembling soul of a coward into valour ; take a draught, oh ! king, try the magic power."

And as he spoke he filled the royal goblet, and placed it before his patron.

" I will, Nym, I will," returned the king, in a low, dejected tone, at the same time raising the cup to his quivering lips, " there is, indeed, strength in the goblet, and courage in the potent wine ; but mine are not every-day terrors, the palsying sights that I have this night beheld would have disordered the bravest soul," and as he spoke, he put the wine to his lips—but that same instant did his eyes distinguish a deep red light on the wall, to his shuddering sight as of blood, though simply caused by the reflection of the queen's lamp through the crevices of the oaken wainscot. He wildly dashed the cup from him, and pointing to the spot, screamed out—

" See, see, Nym, again there's blood—there, there—the grave will not—cannot hide it"—he

buried his face in his hands and groaned—  
“every where does it meet me—all, all is blood  
and horror.”

The queen trembled to extremest agony to witness so dreadful a condemnation, as that to which her husband's crimes had given him, and she sickened to think that so horrible a wretch should be the companion of her most secret hours—that such a demon should lie in her bosom, and she be compelled to endure his caresses. But her reflections were briefly changed.

The ruffian companion of her lord's midnight hours felt not—his callous flinty soul could not feel his remorse, nor was it in his nature to be subject to his terrors; he seemed promptly to decide that it was neither blood nor any superhuman cause that occasioned the appearance, at which the king's coward and trembling apprehension so miserably quailed, and hastily rising from his seat, he struck the pannel with his heavy sword. The scanty wainscot yielded to the blow, and a considerable fracture soon appeared.



A loud, exulting laugh followed this unlooked-for result, and the ruffian at once prepared to repeat the blow, triumphantly demanding from his astonished master, "What thinkest thou of that, oh! king—blood indeed! more likely treason methinks," and a second blow fell heavily on the shattered pannel.

But the queen had already retreated from her doubtful hiding-place—she had at once guessed, from Jamy's manner, that the ruffian had discovered her concealment, and instantly snatching up the lamp, she hurried quickly along the passage, and effected her escape, as his second blow seemed to shiver the unresisting partition to pieces.

Cautiously closing the door by which she had entered, she hastened to her apartment as rapidly as prudence permitted her, and having gained it unperceived, instantly commenced disrobing herself; well judging, that if either the king or his attendant had chanced to gain a glimpse of her figure, he would immediately demand an explanation, which would, in its consequences, compel her to admit having been

a witness of his secret weakness. She knew that his jealous soul would disbelieve her warmest assertions of the accident, by which she had gained the knowledge of that hidden gallery, as also of the little use to which she had applied it; she preferred, therefore, even by dissimulation, to avert every suspicion of her intrusion, rather than by an open declaration of the real fact to run the certain risk, not only of being discredited, but also of becoming subject to dark and severe surmises, which her sad condition wanted not to render it cheerless and desolate. She sought, therefore, by instantly preparing for rest, to distract any suspicions that might already attach to her, or prevent any applying, was she so far free from them.

She had not judged incorrectly: scarcely had she committed herself to her maidens' hands, when a knock was heard at the door, and the king demanded admittance. Isabella quickly assumed as much composure as her disordered spirits permitted, and in an apparently placid tone requested him to enter.

It has already been observed with what facility the royal hypocrite could mask over his feelings, and disguise his strongest emotions: even whilst the bitterest rancour boiled within his breast, the blandest courtesy would mantle on his features, and he could smile even as he murdered.

Had not Isabella known some little of her husband's subtlety; had she not actually beheld his remorse, and, even yet, been shuddering with the horror of its remembrance, she would almost have discredited the possibility, that the smiling careless being who now approached her was the same wretch, whose crimes and anguish had, but a brief moment before, tortured almost to a phrenzy of terror.

But, alas, she knew him too well—too miserably did she know him and his base deceit; and though the mocking smile wherewith he greeted her struck like chilling ice to her heart—for it seemed to her as if a demon's withering influence was upon her—still to her present misgivings of her self-command, his assumed levity was strength and resolution.

"We need our sweet mistress's pardon," exclaimed the king, in a gay, lively tone, in which not even the queen's earnest scrutiny could detect the merest sign of any mental disorder; "but 'tis the misfortune of our station, that our dearest wishes are to be thwarted of their enjoyment, and those hours, which we would devote to the joy that here smiles upon us, be constrained to less grateful occupations—may we however hope, fair lady, that we are forgiven?"

"My lord," returned the queen, forcibly checking her agitation, "'twere difficult to forgive where we esteem there has been no offence given; our duty goes before our judgment, my lord, and prevents our even fancying ourself slighted."

"'Tis well, my gentle Isabel," rejoined the king, a certain caustic sharpness mocking his accompanying smile, "if thy judgment prevents not thy desire, and our seldom leisure be not as contenting as our more frequent society. Women, my lady, are but as a beauteous landscape where all seems smiling

pleasure, as if, indeed, its loveliness but smiled for us alone, and nought but joy were in its beholding; 'tis, however, often but a deceptive picture, nor would it bear a nearer scrutiny: there may, perhaps, be many a blank, cheerless, forbidding blot, which we do not see—perhaps would hardly have suspected—and 'tis indeed as well that we see them not, that all should be believed fair, and seeming be in place of a better reality.”

“My lord!” haughtily interrupted Isabella, indignant at the imputation which the king’s similitude seemed to imply. But John quickly checked this unwonted spirit of the meek Isabella;

“Stay, stay, gentle mistress, we merit not thy wrath; thy duty we believe as firm and true as this very earth’s foundation—wrong us not, therefore, by such a thought as thy lip’s indignant curl seems to declare—we were absent, Isabel—let it pass—and as an idle wind let it be no more remembered—”

The king looked around—

“I would fain see the Lady Maud—your

grace's maiden—but she is not here, methinks,"—he spoke in an even more careless tone.

"The gentle Maud, my lord," returned the queen, instantly detecting his purpose, and prepared to meet it, "is unable to see your grace, a severe and oppressing illness has, and still does confine her to her apartment."

"Ha!" exclaimed the king, for the moment off his guard, "then was it the Lady Therèse that I saw even now in the western gallery?"

"No, my lord," quickly returned Therèse, with the firmness of sincerity, "I have not been absent from my lady's apartment for some hours."

"As I can answer," added the queen, at the same time seeking to divert John's notice by adjusting a part of her dress; "wherefore asks your grace?"

"Mere curiosity, my sweet one"—the wily John almost failed to conceal his disappointment—"nothing more; I but thought that the lady avoided us somewhat too determinedly, and we would fain know wherefore." John looked severely at Therèse, as if he still

suspected her to be the object of his quest, the maiden's unyielding confidence, however, seemed to remove his suspicion; he glanced quickly round, but still obtained not any better satisfaction—his chagrin seemed to overcome his power to conceal it, and shortly observing to the queen,

“ My sweet Isabel must yet excuse our absence, urgent affairs still detain me, and I would not encroach upon her rest,” he abruptly quitted the apartment, leaving the queen rejoiced at his departure, and delighted with the fortunate issue of her anxious management.

Isabella listened for some moments in minutest attention: she readily distinguished John's stealthy steps as he passed along the gallery, and, after trying the princess's door, return softly to that of Maud, whose feeble reply to his demand she also distinguished; he then passed away, she well guessed, to explore further the secret communication thus strangely and unexpectedly made known to him.

But Isabella waited not longer; glad so well to have escaped such narrow detection, and, desirous to avoid any fresh questionings in her present disordered spirits, she retired instantly to bed, and, in the king's admitted absence, sought sleep and the temporary oblivion of her griefs.

Sleep, however, answered not her anxious wishes—shuddering remembrances, and strange, horrible images, agitated her, dispelling the very chance of rest, and the night passed heavily along in feverish disquiet. If, however, in the many various inquiries which then presented themselves to her mind, there was one stronger than another, it was that of the mysterious means by which the secret door had been left open—the scenes to which that passage might have led her; and in spite of the certain risk of detection to which she might expose herself, she determined, whatever the consequences, still further to explore it.

The next morning, however, every idea of such a purpose was at an end, the door was securely fastened, nor did she ever again find



it open ; and what was even more unsatisfactory, no allusion was in any way made to it, not even an inquiry—and that hidden gallery seemed to her almost as a dream—a thing which had never been but in the idle wanderings of her mind.

## CHAPTER VI.

"There is no art

To find the mind's construction in the face."

*Macbeth.*

THAT same morrow, after his horrible fright and anguish, was the king nowhere visible; closely secluded with the ruffian Jamy in the secret closet, it was generally supposed throughout the palace, that some more than usual desolation was preparing; and strange whisperings and significant nods passed freely about.

But by one member of the royal household, the true cause of that privacy was well guessed; the queen readily knew, that to make good the

fracture which Jamy's sinewy blow had produced in the wainscot, was the purpose they so warily attempted—perhaps still further to explore the deep recesses which it had laid open to them—but she kept that knowledge to herself, not even did she breathe a suspicion of her belief.

It was considerably after noon, when an audience was demanded of the king by the Duke of Ramsay.

De Laci was the page that morning in attendance, and the only person permitted to approach near the door of the royal closet; and even he was commanded on no account to intrude upon the king's privacy. At first the youth returned the king's general orders not to be disturbed; but upon the demand being peremptorily maintained, the page no longer refused to communicate it, though his temerity had nigh been severely punished—had it not indeed been one so useful and so highly esteemed by his master; John's turbulent passion might at once have destroyed him.

But it was De Laci, and doubt could not

rest on so tried a servant. John therefore curbed his anger, and listened to his message.

"Fitz-Alan here?" he exclaimed, a savage delight quickly taking place of his previous wrath: "is it indeed so?—ha! a brighter day dawns upon us;" he seemed lost in anxious musings: then suddenly starting to himself, he demanded—

"And who comes with him, Laci?"

"My Lord, I know not," humbly returned the page, his present fears effectually repressing his wonted effrontery, "I stayed not to inquire."

"The saucy minion,"—the king seemed scarcely conscious that he spoke aloud—"by Heaven, but we'll curb his haughty pride, and teach his lofty neck a more lowly submission;" and gnashing his teeth, he clenched his hands together, as if his rage would have exulted in his quick destruction.

He turned hastily round, and locking his ruffian assistant securely up, leaving Laci as a continued guard against intruders, he quickly passed along, and with the hurried step of wildest passion, rushed to the audience-chamber.

But the real state of John's mind was no longer visible when he passed its portal ; in an instant, quick as his step pressed forwards, did every sign of wrath disappear, and gracious smiles and fairest courtesy give a winning favour to the preceding moment's deformity of his visage. Nor were his words less conciliating ; pleased satisfaction and warm assurance seemed alone in his thoughts, as if he would have charmed away every remembrance of any former difference ; and it were, to look upon him, as a lie even to think of the rancour and venom-hate, that almost choked his inward soul with its bitterness.

If indeed there was one expression in John's manner that was sincere, it was the surprise wherewith he beheld Hubert de Bourgh as the companion of the Duke of Ramsay's audience ; so great in fact was his astonishment at his unlooked-for appearance, and the assured fidelity which it seemed to indicate, that scarcely had he returned the duke's haughty salutation by an almost servile affability, than with the same breath he added—

“And thou too, my good Hubert ! this is, indeed, a pleasure we had scarcely dared to promise ourself.”

“Your grace,” returned De Bourgh, as if with the indignation of offended innocence, “does me injustice in your thoughts, and deals hardly with one, whose duty and your highness’s commands have alone kept from your presence.”

“De Bourgh !” exclaimed the king, and his acknowledgment was in part a sincere one, “we *have* done thee wrong—circumstances, and busy, envious tongues biassed our better judgment—let us not add to our regret the doubt that thou forgivest us.”

“Your majesty is well aware that Hubert de Bourgh is no maker of professions ; his character is already sufficiently known to your grace to need any superfluous breath of his to declare to you, that his truth is in no degree less sincere, than the gracious assurance wherewith your majesty’s condescension admits the error.”

“Then, my good Hubert, we are quits, and let my mistrust be ever between us, as though

it had never been,"—and John, who, though so great an adept at dissimulation himself, miserably failed to detect the insincerity of others, believed that his few words of empty profession had turned back the wavering chamberlain to his duty: he turned to the expecting Ramsay, who, in proud disdain seemed to await his further notice, and whilst his averted eye betrayed the falsehood of his assertion, addressed him in fairest accents; "And may we, indeed, hope, that Fitz-Alan's heart is with us, even as our heart is with his, and that the strength of his mighty aid, so esteemed by us, goes along with our armies to this approaching struggle? My lord duke, never even in thought have we wronged thee, so as to know a doubt of thy fidelity to our person—nor has our love for thee been less true than our confidence."

"Pointz Fitz-Alan, then," returned the unbending duke, "is unwittingly beholden to your grace; he knew not, nor even guessed that such an abundance of the royal favour were his—my lord king, I humbly tender my grateful acknowledgments."

John bit his lips—the sarcasm which played in Ramsay's smile, and betrayed his estimate and contempt of the royal professions, so goaded his hasty ire, as to force him to exclaim, as the duke almost mocked him by the disdainful bow that accompanied his words.

“Not too low, my lord duke; we would fain spare Fitz-Alan's stiffened neck, nor pain him with any needless deference.”

Ramsay almost smiled at the king's petulance, as he retorted,

“Your grace's kindness has, indeed, no limit—so entirely beyond Fitz-Alan's desert.—Wrong, my lord, and bitter disappointment have, in truth, somewhat palsied my once ready obeisance, and your highness is more than kind to excuse my infirmity.”

“Would it were but an infirmity, my lord duke,” sharply returned John: “bodily diseases often become ready excuses for the neglect of an unwilling service.”

“And if, my liege,” again retorted Ramsay, “my services are unwilling—your highness



will excuse my so promptly applying your grace's words—where rests the fault?"

"Most assuredly not on ourself, Fitz-Alan—our cousin's warm adherence never has been ours."

"My liege," interrupted the duke, obeying a secret sign that De Bourgh made him, "let us not waste our temper in needless and irritating sarcasms. I come rather to smooth existing differences than to create any fresh ones. Your grace has sent for me—obediently do I attend your commands, and with every desire to meet the royal wishes, humbly wait to know them."

The duke's altered tone and manner seemed to perplex and confuse the king; he hesitated for a moment in what way to understand the change, and then somewhat hastily, and without his wonted wariness, replied,

"My lord duke, we would have your effectual aid on our behalf."

"And truly is it your's, my liege?" replied the duke, in a calm unruffled tone, "make but my aid effectual by the restoration of my rights."

My lord, without the lands so basely withheld from me, my means go not with my wishes."

"Thy lands, good cousin," quickly rejoined the king, "shall be restored—is not our royal word already thine, even thrice assured?"

"But, my liege, might not the royal will at once make that word something more than breath?"

"Fitz-Alan, thou must be patient—it would ill indeed become our royal authority, to suffer our will to run counter to the laws of our land—be content—all shall be made right; we cannot rashly snatch Lord Howard's lands and do violence even to his believed rights."

"*Rights*, my liege? what possible right can Howard have but a prince's favour?"

"Be not rash, my lord duke, what right had Fitz-Alan to the lands but *his* prince's favour?"

"What right, my lord king? the best of all rights, that of the sword—even as my Lord of Surrey, would I answer him that dared to question it, and cleave the caitiff to the earth!"

"My lord duke!" quickly exclaimed De Bourgh, as if to check his wrath.

"Ramsay, Ramsay," interrupted the king, struggling with his own emotion, "thy passion blinds thee—yield not so wholly to its violence. Again we pledge ourselves to see thee righted, and our word must be thy present content."

"Surely the noble Ramsay," suggested De Bourgh, desirous that the duke should not attempt too much, "may trust his sovereign's word—at least for so brief a space."

"Well hast thou said, my good Hubert," rejoined John, not slightly pleased with his apparent zeal; "let but Fitz-Alan wait upon our good offices, and he shall not have cause to complain: we seek, indeed, too anxiously to bind him to us to thwart his wishes."

"Be content, my lord," intreated De Bourgh, as if anxious to secure the king's purposes, "well mayest thou trust our royal master's assurance."

"But, my liege," inquired the duke, as if still hesitating to yield, "should my feeble

said be at your grace's command, when will the promised justice be done to me?"

"As we have already promised thee, Fitz-Alan,"—John chuckled within himself as he thought how his subtlety had cheated even the proud and wary Ramsay—"by the speediest haste of our laws shall it be thine. Wherefore should our cousin hesitate? Does he think that the feeble Brittany would do him a swifter justice, and his boyish weakness better curb the haughty arrogance that mocks our stronger sway?"

"My liege," interrupted the duke, "that taunt might have been spared; the king knows that, even as his mouth speaks those words, his heart feels them to be unmerited."

"We do, Fitz-Alan," returned the royal hypocrite, his most gracious smile seeking to conciliate the ready offence of his former words, "we but said it to try our cousin's zeal; we believe him indeed to be somewhat distorted in his vision of our love for him, through the fallacious idea which he indulges, that his demands should be pre-eminent above all other

claims ; but still we doubt not—it were impossible to doubt his loyalty ;” and even as his words sought to assure the duke of his favour, he could not repress the caustic accent which his jealous suspicion gave to those words, and so evidently betrayed their emptiness.

De Bourgh saw that the Duke was at the moment unprepared to meet this glaring hypocrisy, and quickly observed, with the view of diverting John’s attention,

“ My liege, his grace of Ramsay no longer looks with any other vision than that of duty ; I know his mind, and, but that his pride withheld him, he had long ere this deferred to your highness’ wishes.”

“ If, my good Hubert,” blandly replied the king, “ our cousin knew thy honest zeal, or thou couldest teach him the smallest sense of thy tried devotion, we were well content.”

“ And your grace,” rejoined the duke, with much apparent fervency, “ *shall* be well content—Fitz-Alan scorns professions as empty breath—deeds, not words, are his delight, and the future *shall* well declare his full devotion to his prince.”

"We thank our cousin," returned the king, as if determined not to be behind-hand in the warmth of his profession; "it is indeed delightful when duty and our hearts go so cheerily together. We shall, my lord, esteem this day as one of the happy ones of our life, that thus gives us the assured fealty of one so dear to us as his grace of Ramsay."

"My liege overpowers me with his courtesy," the duke bowed to conceal the obtrusive smile that struggled on his features; "Fitz-Alan, however, will not longer trespass on your highness' leisure; many and important arrangements to which the provision for the approaching contest will compel me, may keep me for some days from your grace's presence, but after that, it shall be my first care to prove where my duty is due."

"My lord, our best thoughts go along with you,"—the king smiled his most gracious assurance—the duke withdrew—and the farce of that empty show was at an end.

"The wily traitor!" exclaimed the kingly hypocrite, ere the duke had yet scarcely quitted

the presence ; “almost do I doubt thy words and believe thee false—thy *duty due* indeed ! —By the holy Paul, I like not that.”

“My liege,” ventured De Bourgh, to whom the king by his looks seemed to refer for a reply, “can but try Fitz-Alan’s truth, and should he prove false, your vengeance is at once upon him. May not your grace be too mistrustful of your true servants?—it is indeed ungracious to a subject’s fidelity, and almost pines his loyalty into useless indifference.”

“Perhaps it may be so,” observed John, musingly.

“Indeed, my liege,” continued De Bourgh, “I feel that it is so : even your long-tried chamberlain escapes not your grace’s doubt and displeasure, for the simple reason, that your very commands compel his absence somewhat longer than your impatience deems essential ; nor does your highness scruple to give heed to false and lying tongues to your servant’s prejudice.”

“My good Hubert, we have already said it—we have wronged thee in our thoughts”—De Bourgh could scarcely, even in his certain

knowledge of John's universal deceit, discredited the assurance of his present manner—"let it be forgotten, it shall not again be repeated—nay, we will go farther, even for thy sake will we trust this haughty duke, and at least give him an opportunity to be true. Believe me, De Bourgh, thou art ever near to our heart—too near for any suspicion again to reach thee; and at least make grateful the assurance to ourself, by the pleasing witness of contented looks."

De Bourgh bowed lowly as the king smiled good-humouredly on him, and quitted the chamber.

And the audience was over—an audience teeming with deceit and overflowing with subtlety; though if any one was deceived, and that lying fraud was less visible to one than another, despite his exultation at his own believed management, it was to the usurper himself—the dupe of his own falsehood.

De Bourgh stayed not longer in the palace, anxious purposes seemed in his mind:—and John, he returned speedily to his former privacy,



—some secret counsels seemed to constrain his attention. The queen was in her apartment, and absent—as if brooding over some bitter disappointment. Poor Maud still lay forlorn and desolate—the events of the preceding night had precluded Isabella from making known to the king the maiden's case. All seemed out of order, even the laughter-loving Thérèse was grave; and the poor senseless Eleanor disturbed by some strange and unusual disorder, and the sudden starts and many deep-drawn sighs that marked her behaviour, seemed to indicate some serious ailment.

## CHAPTER VII.

“ Another day, another day,  
And yet another wears away.”

*Bridal of Triermain.*

THE third day had arrived, and its evening was now fastly closing, when various muffled figures were seen stealing stealthily along the more private avenues that led to Wolvesley Castle, the princely residence of Henry de Blois, the turbulent Bishop of Winchester : a fortress, though once almost demolished, still far exceeding the royal palace in strength and grandeur, and which that refractory prelate, at once to shew his daring, and to secure himself against the well-merited vengeance of his

sovereign, had built, not only in the royal city itself, but in actual rivalry of the king's palace ; where confident in his safety, he scrupled not to use his ghostly office in the furthering of the most ambitious projects.

They passed quickly along, each ever and anon pausing to scrutinize that no spy hung upon his steps—a danger materially lessened by the charms of the busy fair, which was then at its height—until turning rapidly round the last angle in their path, they were lost in the denser darkness of the castle alleys.

But within the castle's walls there was a brighter prospect—there, concealment no longer seemed necessary. A noble and a valiant host had met together, and, whatever their misgivings, one single doubt of the truth that bound them all together never intruded into the mind of any. There were indeed other doubts—other misgivings—scruples too—even fears, that wofully repressed the confidence their numbers should have given, and checked the cheering promise of success, which even to the

fearful and wavering, that proud assembly should have assured.

Each, indeed, looked inquiringly at his neighbour, as if to learn how far his ardour was already burning, and that he would light his own colder caution at his warmer zeal; and if perchance some more generous spirit should speak his soul's devotion to the cause, the ready shrug, and the eyes askance, which followed the avowal, bespoke the wary hesitation that ruled the bulk of the assembly. It seemed, indeed, that they came rather to learn upon what hopes they might give themselves to the struggle, than as men whose hearts were already given. But when, as the meeting still increased, and the more devoted and powerful confederates joined them, and the proud Earls of Clare and Northumberland, and the no less noble Barons Eustace de Vescey, Geoffrey de Lusignan, and Hugh Neville, appeared—men renowned in arms and unyielding in their known purpose of curbing the tyrant's power; when the implacable and indignant Fitz-Arnulf

stepped forth with the hurried haste of deepest resentment ; and above all, when the wary and powerful Ramsay shewed himself, with the open candour of one who had unhesitatingly devoted himself and his best strength to the struggle, a better and a happier spirit seemed to have birth ; and though wary caution still suggested many prudent inquiries, they were submitted rather with a desire to the removal of any doubts, than to throw fresh obstacles in the way of success ; as if in spite of the hesitation which they evidenced, a free and hearty zeal but waited to follow the satisfying of their restraining scruples.

Their ghostly host, the Bishop of Winchester, was the first to address the meeting : his mild, silvery tones soon commanded universal silence, as each specious word that he uttered sunk deeply into the hearts of his hearers.

“My Lords and gallant Knights,—Our humble walls are indeed honoured by this proud and noble presence—so overwhelmed am I by the many lofty eyes that gaze upon me, that my abashed tongue falters to declare the few

words which this proud occasion demands from me, and to bid you welcome—”

A murmur of applause filled up the pause which here occurred in his address.

“ I am but one—a small humble one, among the many anxious hearts around me, that wait to learn the object of this our meeting. I have granted my castle, indeed, for that I wish well to the cause of justice—even as He whose minister I am, is, and loves to be just—as that its poor provisions were deemed convenient to our purpose. So far, therefore, I may be thought already committed, but on no account further than that thought am I yet pledged ; and even, as the highest and the least among you, do I wait to hear the arguments now about to be adduced, and even as you, free to decide, as my judgment, and that prudent and necessary regard for our individual welfare may rule me. With this short explanation, I leave the course of your deliberations to better hands.”

There was a pause of several minutes after the bishop had ceased speaking, ere any one

followed up his prefatory address ; all eyes seemed turned to the Duke of Ramsay, as if the very unexpectedness of his appearance attached no slight importance to his opinion. But the duke seemed little inclined to answer the implied expectation, he looked calmly forward, nor even betrayed a consciousness that their eager gaze had reached him.

De Bourgh, who had that moment entered the hall, instantly perceived the hesitation, and apprehensive lest what really arose from a mere backwardness to be the first to speak, might be construed either into a poverty of the argument to be brought forward, or disinclination to be committed in the struggle, he quickly broke the ominous pause.

“ Would, my lords, it had fallen to better hands, and a more eloquent tongue to declare to you, wherefore thus, in numbers that delight my soul to behold, and in strength, which insures our fullest hopes, we are assembled together ; but since there is perhaps no one amongst you, who has laboured longer, or more anxiously for the achievement of that

dear purpose, which even now, in the irresistible prowess I see around me, seems secured to us, as that I wish to be the first to declare my firm allegiance and entire devotion to our lawful king, Arthur of Brittany, as my determination by every possible means to hurl the base usurper from his ill-gotten throne and place our true sovereign in his stead, I overlook my insignificance, and at once stand before you."

Hubert paused, it might be to arrange his words, or that he hoped for an expression of some reciprocal feeling from those who heard him; none however came, some few indeed seemed moved by his words, others too, though scanty in numbers, uncovered themselves, as the name of their lawful prince was pronounced; but the bulk of the assembly stood still and motionless, nor had the moody calm which pervaded them, much in it of any better promise. De Bourgh continued—

"My Lords, we are here met to declare our attachment to the prince, to devise our first steps in the struggle, and to receive the royal



Philip's assurance of his staunch co-operation. "My Lords, we would have no declaration but what comes warm and free from the heart, nor would we wish one single individual to commit himself, unless his whole soul goes with the avowal; before, therefore, the French ambassador is admitted amongst us, I would submit this draught of the intended insurrection, in which it has been attempted to assign to each a post of honour and exertion; and I would, on behalf of those who have called this noble assembly, be glad to hear and to answer such objections (if any there should be) which may apply to that or any other feature in our plans, that, satisfaction beginning with us, our course may know no after hesitation."

De Bourgh handed the scroll forwards, marking, with an anxious eye, the varied countenances of the successive ones who examined it; and little of satisfaction did he find in the cold, unmoved looks, with which they appeared so cautiously to content themselves.

Still no one seemed inclined to address the

meeting, either in approbation or condemnation of the plan; it seemed to his jealous zeal, indeed, as if there was not sufficient interest excited, even that they should seek the removal of any felt objection.

De Bourgh's ardent soul felt indignant at the over caution that seemed so miserably to repress their more generous emotions, and scarcely able to conceal his annoyance, he somewhat bitterly observed to the Bishop of Winchester, who stood near to him—

“Perhaps, as our ghostly father has alone found his tongue, he would state, where he would wish a change, or where desire information?”

“As for me, my valiant De Bourgh,” returned the pious prelate, meekly raising his eyes, “it would ill become one of my sacred character to mix in the debates of blood and violence, to which this struggle necessarily leads you. My poor care, indeed, is but for the welfare of that neglected, despised church, now almost as sheep without a shepherd, or whom the greedy goats seek to drive from out

the vineyard: and if, indeed, I would ask one merest insight into your plans, 'twere but to know, how long these hirelings shall oppress and thwart the Lord's anointed, and their proud arrogance trample under foot the lowly, humble ones, who now scarcely cry out against their oppressors?" As he spoke, the Bishop submissively lowered his head, seeming to act the lost condition of the church, under its present unworthy guides.

"Ah! my Lord," promptly replied the politic De Lusignan, one of the firmest of the confederates, "when the poor church has such a shepherd as my Lord of Winchester, to preside and direct it, and his warm zeal to his prince, its deliverer, is returned with its highest honours, what a bright and a happy sun would then chase away this midnight darkness! what a glorious morning would then dawn on our land!"

"De Lusignan," returned the contented prelate, "thou shamest me with thy unmerited words—though in good truth the meridian splendour which should then shine upon us,

would indeed revive our barren land to holiest fruits; what thinks the princely Northumberland of such a happy consummation?"

"Oh! my good lord," replied the earl, "where De Blois is, all must be right." The prelate returned his accompanying smile, as if well understanding his meaning. "I believe indeed that I speak the general opinion of those around me, when I wish well to the cause and heartily desire its fullest attainment; and 'tis perhaps but an individual thought, when I state my opinion, that a better scheme might have been devised for securing our wishes, than this draught suggests."

"My Lord," interrupted De Bourgh, "that plan is prepared merely to give some general idea of the insurrection, and waits, as it much requires, the correcting hand of wisdom and experience; the cause were indeed indebted, if my Lord of Northumberland would undertake its correction, and his well-tutored skill, assisted by such others as he may appoint, decide upon a more happy course for our adoption."

"Do, good Northumberland," entreated the

Duke of Ramsay, "it could not be in better hands, nor would any further objection on that head then again perplex us—for my own part, however, I see no difficulty in that point, I rather anticipate disappointment from another source, where our zealous De Bourgh appears so entirely content. King Philip is well known to us all as an intriguing, crafty prince, and although the tie that binds him to our interest is as strong as so fair and noble a daughter can make it, I yet doubt his sincerity; and ere I, for one, can devote myself to the struggle, I should wish to know his messenger's communication, and what assurance it has in it. With permission, therefore, and the concurrence of those around me, I would propose, that the French ambassador be at once admitted."

"Stay, my Lord of Ramsay," quickly exclaimed De Bourgh, wishful to anticipate such a decision, "let us, at least, first know that we ourselves are determined, ere we admit a stranger, to witness any dissension among us, or even the cool caution, that seems to rule our proceedings. I would rather ask, have any of

the valiant spirits around me any secret misgivings, or any yet unanswered doubts, that repress their readier warmth, and keep back even the look of satisfaction? Speak, I beseech you, my friends—Fitz-Arnulf, art thou, too, silent?”

“De Bourgh,” returned the earl, in a voice of no slight emotion, “Fitz-Arnulf’s mind is already determined, he hesitates not for any satisfaction—he wavers not—doubts not: for the veriest chance of curbing this fell tyrant’s power, or thwarting his meanest wishes, would he devote his soul and body to any cause. Let, therefore, those who are less determined, or have less cause for their violence, make the demand where satisfaction is required; I ask none—require none—render but my aid effectual by the means which my necessities lack, and I am yours—all, too, that I have is yours.”

“Ay, that is the rub,” exclaimed the veteran De Vescey; “’tis folly talking of doing this and doing that, when our poverty won’t let us do any thing.”

“ Very true, Eustace,” rejoined Robert de Ros, who stood by him ; “ I, too, had long since declared myself, but that I felt the same restriction ; ’tis a hard necessity, no doubt, but ’tis a plaguy one to surmount.”

“ And a necessity, too,” exclaimed two or three voices at once, “ that applies pretty generally :” and almost all eyes seemed turned to De Bourgh for the expected information on this important feature in their deliberations.

He promptly replied,

“ Some of you, my friends, are already advised that we are even now provided to our utmost need with the necessary means for prosecuting even a protracted struggle—to the rest I now declare that fact, agreeable as I feel it must be, to all well-wishers to our cause—for one and all, will there be ample provision for all needful purposes.”

“ Ha ! that sounds well,” exclaimed old De Vescey, who had expended all his own resources in the wars of the Holy Land, and whose hope to better himself in the approaching struggle had alone stirred up his ancient courage to join

the confederacy. "I'm all King Arthur's man for one."

"And I, and I," re-echoed some score of similarly appointed associates; "give us but the means and we'll well improve them."

"'Tis well," returned De Bourgh, only half satisfied with the doubtful zeal, which had thus suddenly taken place of their former silent apathy—" 'tis better if all other objections be as happily answered."

"Methinks, De Bourgh," suggested the wily Ramsay, "that all objections are even now answered, and thy apt satisfaction on this head contents the very desire for any further explanation—what say our friends—content? is any not content?"

"Not I," replied Lord Moubray, who, despite his late assurance, had evidently waited for a full satisfaction on this point, "if but De Bourgh's means are as secure as he believes them."

"Hugh Neville," abruptly interrupted De Bourgh, "thou knowest that thy adherence is only asked on this condition."



"Then, long live King Arthur," returned the baron, striving to make up for his delay by the warmth of his declaration. "I believe, indeed, I speak the general feeling, that it is not the pelf itself, but our actual need, that renders a supply essential even to the thought of our joining the insurrection—and for one, with such an aid, willingly do I give myself to a struggle which all good men must approve, and which the God of justice will surely bring to a happy issue."

"Amen," responded the ghostly De Blois—"the church's prayers shall not be wanting for so happy a consummation, and I, her unworthy son, will joyfully be one in her most frequent orisons."

"And now," exclaimed the Duke of Ramsay, "if there be any other objection, let it be at once stated." No one spoke—the duke looked slowly round. "All satisfied? then let us e'en hear King Philip's message, that Fitz-Alan may not be alone in the withholding of his content."

De Bourgh hesitated not longer, but at once

quitted the hall ; and instantly, when no longer restrained by the presence of this acknowledged director of the meeting, as well as staunch friend of the prince, did the loosened tongues of the whole assembly, as if to atone for their previous silence, burst out as distant thunder, in innumerable dissertations on the merits of the cause, and of its proposed prosecution.

Not many moments however had elapsed, when the voices suddenly ceased, and a breathless silence as instantly ensued. All eyes seemed turned to the door by which De Bourgh had retired ; he was again there—but it was not on *him* that they gazed in that silent wonder—Fair as brightest paradise to look upon—beautiful as our fondest dreams of loveliness—matchless in form—and radiant with the soul's high intelligence, as if native majesty had set his seal, and royalty were her existence—a young and lovely creature stood at the veteran's side, and in her shrinking bashfulness clung to him for support.

As gentlest modesty did she blush, as if woman's timidity held her back, and for the mo-

ment repressed the high purpose of her soul ; it seemed indeed, as if her slight and fragile form, and the feminine delicacy that smiled on her features and marked her carriage in that downcast hesitation, belied the intent which her presence among armed and violent men seemed to indicate.

So young too—softest peace and sweet retirement were more meet for her early spring than angry violence and the greedy gaze of men.

She lifted up her eyes—it was but for one brief moment that she raised them, when the many eager looks that met her glance, shrunk her even more deeply beneath the veil of those downcast eyes, and she drew more closely around her the royal robes, which her princely form so much adorned ; but that one look, brief as it was, declared the lofty unbending spirit which inhabited her, and in those sparkling eyes, there was the assurance that no common trial could daunt the fixed purpose of her soul.

That same universal silence still continued ; she motioned De Bourgh to advance—grateful pleasure and complete content seemed in the vete-

ran's looks, as gazing first on his beauteous charge, and then on the admiring eyes, who, like him delighted in her loveliness, he conducted her slowly down the steps that led into the hall. He paused ere he reached their termination, and looking proudly round—how happy to his faithful soul was that contenting moment ! —he fervently exclaimed,

“Brothers in arms and loftiest daring, King Philip sends his fairest messenger—the noble Brittany pledges you with his dearest treasure” —he gallantly uncovered himself, “your gracious queen, the lovely Marie, awaits your willing homage.”

There was but one moment's pause as of unmixed astonishment, and then—the effect was electrical—the whole united voices of the dense assembly burst forth in loud and long continued rapture—

“God save our lovely queen—God save King Arthur !” was the tumultuous cry that deafened the air, and gave assurance of as true a devotion, as even the jealous soul of De Bourgh could have asked.

A joyful tear of ecstasy stood in the veteran's eye, a grateful throb of, oh ! how sweet delight, glowed in his heart, and that one moment seemed well to have repaid him for many years of anguish, and ages of harassing regret.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"These, these are deeds Britannia must approve,  
Must nurse their growth with all a parent's love :  
These are the deeds that public virtue owns,  
And, just to public virtue, Glory crowns."

C. BUTSON.

THAT tumultuous excitement still seemed little satisfied, when the warm-hearted De Lusignan, stepping hastily forward within the small circle, which had opened itself immediately before the spot where the princess stood, and holding even more erect his tall, commanding figure, waved his bonnet above his head and called for silence.

Slowly did that tide of transport subside

even at his so earnest bidding, it seemed indeed too joyful a tribute to yield to any lesser influence; nor had it yet passed away, when dropping on his knee before the princess, he exclaimed—

“Most gracious lady, let Geoffrey de Lusignan be the first to declare his soul’s devotion—let his mouth first speak the ready fealty, which waits in every loyal breast around him to offer itself to so fair a mistress, and with him cries out, Heaven preserve to us our gracious queen!”

He took the hand, which De Bourgh’s consideration, rather than the princess’ bewildered disorder tendered, and respectfully kissed it, as the ill-suppressed tide of acknowledgment again rushed forth and drowned all other sounds in its excess.

The princess seemed to struggle with conflicting emotions—to rouse herself to return so fervent greetings; she essayed to speak—the attempt was as if a magic wand had bound up their boisterous zeal in some irresistible spell—it was an instant and a breathless silence that awaited her words.

“My lords and kindest friends,”—she spoke in a trembling voice, yet in a voice so sweet, so musically sweet, that its silvery tones were even more delighting than her beauty—“your loyal warmth beggars our poor thanks, and takes from us the very power to speak our gratitude. Oh, judge me not unkindly, that the very excess of my emotion keeps me dumb! Could you but read this heart, which is even now bursting with gratitude, you would admit that in no respect are we ungrateful.”

The princess seemed again overpowered by her feelings, which the well-meant encouragement of the ready cheers that ensued upon her hesitation rather added to than diminished; but she soon again looked up, and again did that same instant silence await her further words.

“If indeed,” she continued, “in the varied feelings which this proud occasion calls forth, there be one more animating than another, it is, that the illustrious Brittany is so worthy of your love—oh, how worthy! of your best, your fondest devotion; if there be a feeling prouder than another, it is, that the blessed tie which



unites me to him, makes that worth and your esteem of it, the glory of my existence. Oh! my lords, young am I in speech as in years, and the proprieties of my high station are still so little understood, that I am lost in perplexity and fear, lest you might deem me as wanting in feeling as in words. Miserably indeed do I lack the winning tongue of my peerless lord; not even in his loved praises can I speak, as I feel, the thousand graces of his perfect character. And yet I would say, that the brightest gem which adorns him is his love for you, his faithful friends and subjects—the richest jewel that will deck his crown, his hearty desire to promote your welfare.”

“Most sweet and gracious lady,” exclaimed the ancient De Vescey, even whose wintry age seemed warmed by the fair spring of so much loveliness, “content are we, even thrice content of our youthful sovereign’s worth: nay, were it not so, and he even base as he is noble, still for thee, fair queen, would we devote ourselves to his cause, and shed our dearest blood in his behalf.”

“Kind father, accept our thanks and gratitude,”—the princess courteously tendered him her hand—“it were indeed insulting to your reason as ungrateful to your loyalty, to compare his towering excellence with the mean, debased tyrant, who has so long usurped his rights; but oh! when to the dark, gloomy midnight of cruelty and oppression, of falsehood and perfidy, that now hangs so thick upon the land, shall succeed the meridian splendour, which shall soon burst gloriously upon us, and united hearts and happy duty throng to praise the justice and generosity, the truth and uprightness of the princely Arthur, then shall your grateful souls indeed admit his excellence, and this your ready zeal be transmitted to your children as the proudest feature in your existence.”

“It were indeed churlish,” observed the Duke of Ramsay, taking advantage of the moment’s pause, “to deny your highness the grateful expression of our beloved Arthur’s virtues; we want not, however, your grace’s praises, on the which to form either our esti-

mate of his worth, or our devotion to his interest ; his fame is already well known, and well does it assure our best attachment to his person—believe me, our hearts and souls are given to restore to him his rights ; nor let it vex our royal mistress, that aught so ungracious as the mention of the difficulties that confront us should be heard, where transport has so much delighted. But still, with every hearty desire for the attainment of so dear an object, necessity curbs our warmest zeal, and prudence compels us to seek the removal of every doubt. My lady, without King Philip, your royal father's true and efficient aid, our best exertions are fruitless—I would therefore humbly ask, what assurance your highness brings of his firm co-operation ?”

“ Every assurance, my lord—every pledge that even *doubt* can ask,”—the princess spoke with animation ; she stood more erect and commanding, as feeling herself the surety of her father's truth, she added, “ therefore am I come among you—therefore, tearing myself

from the dearer and more fitting duties of my sex, have I exposed myself to difficulties and dangers, that I might better answer every doubt, and assure you, beyond distrust, of his sincerity. The whole energies of King Philip's throne are devoted to the struggle,—even now are his armies levied ; and supported by the arms of Brittany, and the strength of the revolted barons whom the tyrant's treachery has driven from him, he offers an invincible host, and but waits the result of this very meeting ere he renews the struggle. Our good De Bourgh will better explain to you the plan of the campaign than my inexperience can do, —all my father asks, is that your own proceedings keep pace with his, and the same zeal direct your councils: then, indeed, soon will this cruel tyrant be crushed, and a noble prince reign over you, and peace and content again smile on this ill-starred land."

"A consummation, your grace," returned the duke, with much fervency, "devoutly to be wished, and which your royal father's aid

almost now assures to us. With respect, however, to the course of operations, although it were prudent to enter into their consideration with cooler heads and calmer feelings, than our present excitement from so fair and unlooked-for an influence, now permits; still it were desirable, without in any manner going into its scrutiny, to give us an insight into the broad plan of the campaign, and thereby prepare us for its future deliberation. If, therefore, our brave and zealous president—for as such we all esteem the faithful man on whom your highness leans—has no good motive for withholding it, we would have such a brief notice, as I have presumed to suggest.”

“With pleasure, most noble Ramsay,” De Bourgh promptly replied, “do I answer your wish, and the general expectation around me. The main object of King Philip’s movements will be to obtain possession of the strong fortresses on the Norman borders, well known to you as the key to the whole province. No sooner, in the commencement of the struggle, had Tillieres and Boutavant fallen into his pos-

session, than several other strong fortresses submitted almost without resistance; and these barriers removed, an easy way seems opened to rapid success. While, therefore, his whole strength is concentrated for this purpose, it is proposed, that making choice of the exact moment when the sluggish tyrant is passing over into Normandy, our general rising distract his defence, and still further add to his known terrors. The usurper has already delayed his departure beyond all calculation—unless, indeed, it is his wonted needy poverty that keeps him back; but it is now believed that a few days will witness his departure, when burying himself as formerly in the secure defence of Rouen, the Norman residence of his court, his coward indolence will leave to the restless queen-mother and the brave Pembroke the resistance of the French arms. And the ulterior purpose of the campaign will be to surprise the slothful tyrant in his believed security, and if possible, by the possession of his person, at once to terminate the struggle. Our part, therefore, of the glorious enterprise will be to

render effectual our rising by united energy and unflinching devotion."

"Which is willingly pledged," interrupted Ramsay, impatient to declare himself, "and which part, too, shall be well fulfilled.—Fitz-Alan no longer hesitates his full content, but stands boldly forth to conquer, or perish in the attempt—let 'death or victory' not only be our watch-word, but also direct us in the contest. Then, if we succeed—and how can such a spirit fail in such a cause?—our country's richest thanks await us, and proudest glory shall be our reward—and if we die, her tears shall hallow our tombs, and our names be transmitted in her annals as among the most illustrious of her sons."

"Brave Fitz-Alan," rejoined De Bourgh, as soon as the exuberant exclamation that followed the duke's harangue had subsided, "well dost thou redeem thy hesitation—may every other scruple in the minds of each that hears me, be as well contented; for full satisfaction and unmixed zeal must attend each worker in the cause, or far better were it with-

out his aid ; if, therefore, there be one in this assembly who cannot so go forth in the glorious enterprise—if there be one who even doubts its success—let him at once quit our ranks, and be no longer numbered amongst us.” The veteran paused in his address, he looked anxiously round, each moment standing more proudly erect, as his survey of that determined band went on, and no dissenting word, or even look met his anxious scrutiny,—“ Is there not one among you,” he continued, “ not one looker-back, not one misgiving soul ? Oh, no—’twere impossible that a thought so base could have existence amongst the bravest knights in Christendom. Then, indeed, is our cause warm with hope, and fervent with expectation, and success and fruition must attend us.”

“ And shall well repay our exertions,” exclaimed Lord Moubray, as if wishing by the aridency of his manner to dispel the very remembrance of his previous mistrust. “ Had, indeed, *all* looked back, Hugh Neville had stood even alone in his devotion. But let not our purposes sleep, let not our hearty zeal be



wasted in inaction, and even, as a vital principle of our nature, prey upon itself, for that it has no food for its active work ; lead us forth at once, and what can resist us ?”

“ Stay, stay, my good Neville,” interrupted De Bourgh, smiling at the baron’s exuberant warmth, “ discretion, as well as energy, must go with us, and the proper time be chosen for our exertions, or our more wary foe may teach us that opportunities once forestalled, as well as neglected, may never return. We shall not, however, in any respect be idle ; at this time and place we meet again to-morrow, to deliberate on, and to complete our plans, when we shall hope to find each noble spirit that has graced this night’s exulting meeting.”

“ And bound us,” promptly added the princess, at the same time retiring a few paces towards the entrance door, “ in an everlasting debt of gratitude,”—she bowed gracefully around her ; “ kind, generous friends, for the present—farewell.”

“ Yet, my lords, once more,” called out the gallant De Vescey, checking the evident pur-

pose of the royal Marie to withdraw, "once more, gallant knights and devoted souls, to England's and to Beauty's Mistress let our delighted homage be paid—hail to the peerless Marie, our heart's and our country's Queen!—all hail!"

Long and loud as was the applause which burst forth at the veteran's bidding, perhaps none, not even of the youngest, warmest hearts around him, was more enthusiastic in exulting shouts than the old man himself, who, again and again, as the wearied cry died away, gave it a fresh existence; nor ceased his ready stimulus, until his youthful queen, after repeated and anxious acknowledgments of that universal transport—an acknowledgment which seemed again to overpower her self-command—had gracefully re-ascended the steps, and pausing at their summit again to assure them by a princely gesture of the full feelings that oppressed her, passed slowly from their sight.

Not even then did it entirely subside—different, perhaps, in its nature, freer in its feeling, and less reserved in its expression, still it was

all praise, all admiration, all transport of their fair sovereign's beauty, and delight at her graceful carriage, and her so unlooked-for appearance amongst them.

But even those warm feelings at length subsided; one by one did those pleased admirers quit that stately hall; now, even the most devoted of those generous souls, who had given themselves to right and justice, slowly withdrew from that scene of so proud congratulation, as their lingering step again and again paused to repeat the expression of their content, and speak the happy hopes that animated them.

Now light after light of the brilliant lamps that had illumined that princely council was extinguished—and then, in place of illustrious warriors and peerless beauty, of devoted zeal, and delighted transport, of light and majesty, and loyal shouts and noblest valour, there was nought but the dark, gloomy stillness of midnight, and uninterrupted silence.

## CHAPTER IX.

“Or else what follows ?

Bloody constraint ; for if you hide it

Even in your heart, there will we rake for it.”

*King Henry V.*

THE next day was the se’night day, when, according to his own appointment, the miser’s aids were to be forthcoming ; and the evening had not yet set in, when the boy Albert, already returned from his embassy, sought his habitation.

Not only was Roger Mallet’s house situated in an obscure part of the city, but it was obscure even in its obscurity, being detached from all other buildings, and its approach as

if its meanness should stay the very wish to intrude upon its privacy.

When Albert reached the old man's dwelling, he was at once proceeding to knock for admittance, when his intention was suddenly suspended by a low, moaning sound, occasionally interrupted by suppressed laughter, that seemed to issue from the grated window to the right of the door.

He listened with all the intenseness of anxious apprehension, to gain some more certain sound from which to learn the cause of his alarm; nothing, however, but the same indistinct moaning reached him, and, sensitively alive to the perils that encompassed him, he still hesitated in painful suspense, vibrating between the shrinking dread of some impending danger, and the stimulating desire to learn the cause of that fearful cry. He looked inquiringly towards the window, if it were possible to climb so high, and obtain satisfaction by looking through its grating; but independently of the difficulty of its approach, there seemed so certain a risk of detection, did danger, indeed,

lurk within, that he almost instantly relinquished the idea. He then examined the door, slowly raising the latch with noiseless caution ; to his astonishment and increased apprehension—for strange, indeed, was such a circumstance at the jealous miser's house—the door was unfastened and at once swung open. Albert started back, alarmed at his own temerity, and almost trembling for the probable consequences of his intrusion ; but all seemed quiet, and the stillness around him to be undisturbed, save by that same moaning sound now more plainly heard, and low hoarse voices, that ever and anon seemed to break forth in bitter taunts.

Had Albert's mind been less fearfully excited, or the purpose of his visit of a less extreme interest (the task of learning the fulfilment of the miser's pledge, devolving upon him through De Bourgh's imperative attendance on the adjourned meeting of the confederates), the certain peril which these sounds seemed to indicate, would at once have induced him to seek his own safety by an instant retreat : as it was, however, he paused only to

ascertain that he was so far free from observation, and to decide upon the best course for his further progress.

At this instant a scream, followed by a louder laugh, reached him, and at once obeying the horrible impulse of the moment, he rushed some paces forwards. He had nearly betrayed his intrusion, some object lay on the ground, over which, unnoticed in his hurry, he had nigh fallen. He turned quickly round to examine it; a first glance sufficed—it was the stiff, strangled corpse of old Deborah, the miser's housekeeper. Albert's soul sickened within him—too dreadfully did it declare the murderous destruction that had been at work—too miserably did it explain the fearful cries that each moment issued louder and louder from her poor master's apartment, and, as the death-cry to the sick-bed of trembling superstition, signed to him the desolation of his dearest wishes.

To be near the dead is almost ever repulsive to the living—to be alone, in still and silent gloom with the ghastly remains of what was

life, that now, as it were, mock our existence, seeming horribly to exult in our tremblings, and to cry out to our shuddering souls, "even to this shalt thou come—the bravest—fairest—best"—oh! it is indeed worse than horror—more appalling than fear. But when distorted agony glares upon us, and untutored eyes behold the miserable victim of inhuman murder, and he reads the infallible evidence of the tortured throes—the despairing struggles—the horrible convulsions, which must have preceded the accomplishment of that deed of death, the soul of that beholder undergoes, perhaps, the whole torture of his sufferings.

Strong indeed, therefore, must have been the dreadful interest, which could excite the young and unlessoned Albert to resist his shuddering weakness, and pass from the revolting spectacle before him—it might almost seem with indifference—to seek an explanation of the wailing cry, which so wretchedly declared that the sickening spectacle before him was not the only work of the horrible cruelty that was in operation.



A cold sweat chilled his frame, a low despairing groan burst from him, as his quick ears soon detected the dreaded tones of the monster Jamy, as gibing the evident torture of the poor miser, he turned his moanings into jest—for too well did he understand how ruthless a vengeance had fallen on the poor man—too miserably did he foresee the fell disappointment that awaited the fondest, dearest wishes of his heart, did any accident, or the poor sufferer's desire to purchase his deliverance from that pitiless cruelty, betray the secret store of his wealth, now, no doubt, collected agreeably to his declaration for the use of the confederates.

The stimulus was far too great for any restraint, his excited feelings swelled within him, and seemed to convulse him with tumultuous emotions; the suspense was too dreadful; he looked despairingly round, more however from the disorder of his feelings than from any certain purpose, when, in the dark gloom of the miser's kitchen, in which he then was, rendered more dense by the now gathering dusk, the bright light of the fire, from the inner apart-

ment, shone through a small window in the wall, and instantly attracted his eager notice : the next moment he had availed himself of so fortunate a contingency. His first glance dreadfully increased his previous agitation.

Before a large blazing fire, whose fervent heat was constantly kept up with scrupulous attention, and forcibly held by the ruffians Jamy and Nierenuit, so near to the burning embers that his garments were already consumed to tinder, poor Mallet lay vainly struggling to escape, his heart-rending moans evincing the agony he was enduring.

At each effort that the poor wretch made to extricate himself, or, even by the mere change of position, to relieve some portion of that horrible agony, the ferocious miscreants held him with a firmer grasp, and forced him even nearer to the burning torture, answering his groans with insulting jeers, and mocking his distortions with fiendish grins.

Albert's very soul seemed to writhe for the poor sufferer's agony, human nature called out within him to spare the old creature from so

monstrous a torment—if even by death, to free him from a torture, at which even callous insensibility would have quailed.

But his reflections were suddenly changed, the sound of footsteps passed quickly over his head; he looked fearfully round—his failing spirits felt that a like destruction as that miserable one—the only, the horrible companion of his concealment, might await also himself. But the noise passed on, and he now plainly distinguished the steps descending the secret staircase; he looked eagerly in the direction, where it opened into the apartment; the next moment the ruffian John joined his worthy associates, a bitter taunting smile making the rankling disappointment that irritated him more terribly dreadful to the wretched victim of his cruelty. The miser's quivering eye turned convulsively towards him—though not for mercy—scarcely, even in the agony of that look, did he seem to ask for pity, as if too well he knew that no mercy had existence in that ruthless breast—despair and desolation were rather in the glaring look, that marked each

movement of his tormentor, and waited to learn the fresh torture to which he doomed him.

“Well, my good friend,” jeeringly exclaimed the royal ruffian, approaching as near to the poor wretch as the intense heat of the fire permitted, “how dost thou like thy quarters now—warm enough, I hope, Master Roger, and that the bad fever is fastly oozing out of thee? otherwise thy kind nurses can soon increase the degree of our antidote. How beats thy pulse towards us now, good Roger?—’tis thy loving friend, Master Santer, that asks.”

The poor miser’s indignant passion seemed for the moment even to overpower the sense of his torture. “Monster—murderer—devil!” he almost screamed out, in the excess of his mental and bodily anguish—“Would I could curse thee with a viler epithet!”

“Ha! ha!”—the ruffian pretended to laugh at his rage—“Nym, good soul, by my halidome, the fever returns—a little nearer, Nym—more fuel, Mil—our affection will not suffer any abatement of your kind care.”

The miser shrieked for agony as the ready

monsters roughly obeyed their master's commands ; but still he softened not from his obstinate resolution, still the love of his darling wealth, and the deep resentment which he had vowed, seemed stronger even than life—so strong, as to render that torture more bearable than the relinquishing even of a portion of his wealth, or a degree of his vengeance.

He shrieked but once—and then, as if ashamed of his weakness, and desirous to atone for that sign of failing resolution, suppressed even the moaning cries, which before had been the only evidence of his suffering.

His unyielding pertinacity seemed to exhaust the tyrant's patience, he paced once or twice hastily across the apartment, and then again pausing opposite to the now fainting victim, as if afraid that death might release him from his power, he quickly commanded in the same scoffing tone—

“ A little respite, Nym, thy application is, methinks, somewhat too pungent ; mayhap too, our friend Roger may now be somewhat better inclined to satisfy us—at least let us hear him.”

It was some moments after his prompt removal from the fire, ere Mallet recovered from that stupor of so acute anguish ; his eye seemed still to wander vaguely about, and his flesh to quiver with its torture, as his tormentor proceeded to demand from him in a severer tone,

“ Art thou yet obstinate, Master Mallet ?— wilt thou still persist in withholding thy aid from our necessities ? ”—The miser replied not, scarcely seemed to listen to him ; his wily questioner quickly changed his voice to a softer accent, and in a more earnest manner, and as if pity really directed his words, entreatingly added—

“ Old man, yet would we spare thy grey hairs—despite thy obstinacy and evident purpose to thwart us, still would we have thy willing help, and Master Santer be yet thy friend. Now, hear me once more—that thou hast money, even now hoards of gold about thee, is well known to us ”—Poor Albert ! how miserable to him was this wretched confirmation of his worst fears—this certain admission of the real object of the tyrant’s inhuman cruelty ! “ Ad-

vance them to us for our present need, and we forget all—even shalt thou retain the Lady Eveline's heirship, and farther security will we also make over to thee—refuse us, and not only shall worse tortures than this attend thee, but e'en shall they be increased, until they force from thee thy secret, or thou fallest under their excess. Be advised therefore, Roger, in time, and so save thyself as well as thy adored wealth—thy money we will have, even if each stone of thy dwelling is razed to the ground, and it is well for thee, if with thy gold thou lovest not also thy life. What sayest thou therefore, old man? wilt thou still spurn our offers?"

The miser still replied not; whether it was that his resolution was yet unsubdued, or that too well he knew the false hypocrisy which spake to him, he remained in the same unmoved sullenness, nor evinced by the merest look that he had even heard the tyrant's words.

John's hasty petulance brooked not either this withheld consent, nor the apathy where-

with his offers were met; his former smooth-tongued persuasion was now angriest passion, and, stamping furiously on the ground, he cried out to the two fiends who waited on his will—

“Nay, then, by God’s teeth, be his fate on his own head—take him, devils, and e’en give him a foretaste of hell-fire torments.”

The wretches instantly pounced upon their prey. Albert saw the quivering eye that spoke the miser’s horror, and, no longer able to endure to witness so terrible a torture, he shrunk back from the window through which he looked, heart-sick with anguish, and fainting with terror.

“Spare me—spare me!” the same moment burst wildly from the affrighted victim—instantly had Albert’s eager scrutiny returned to the quitted window—the poor miser was still struggling with his inhuman persecutors—fearful cries again and again burst from him, as they dragged him nearer and nearer to the grate—his terror seemed to choke him—a convulsive throe kept him speechless, and they



had even now forced him almost upon the fire, when, yielding to his agony, he forcibly screamed out—"Spare me—spare me—I submit"—and a loud gurgling groan followed, as if it had been a maniac's laugh—or his very soul had then burst from him.

The ruffians, who held him, looked calmly round for further directions for their procedure; as little mercy, or haste to deliver the victim from his suffering, was there in their inhuman master's manner, as in almost a joking voice he observed—

"Gramercy, good Master Roger, what! dost thou yield at last? and does our wholesome discipline break down thy stubborn obstinacy? Well, well, better now than not at all—but stay your hands, my worthies, until my friend and I fully understand each other. Thou knowest, Roger, the day of grace is past; thou hast refused our friendly offer, and we might justly now refuse thy submission—but see our compassionate mercy, we still extend to thee our favour, and accept thy aids, if they

be but *freely* offered—we would have no *compelled* duty.”

“ For mercy’s sake,” exclaimed the writhing victim, groaning piteously as he spoke, “ spare me but from this, and I am altogether as you would have me.”

“ Loose him, Nym,” returned the tyrant with careless indifference, and in a tone of keenest irony—“ so willing service should not be withheld from its performance—’twere pity, indeed, to baulk so earnest zeal.”

Though only that instant released from the remorseless fangs, whose greedy cruelty would have rather delighted in his destruction than his deliverance, the taunting gibe of his arch persecutor seemed to cut the trembling sufferer to the very quick ; he turned violently round on the floor, where the ruffians had cast him, his whole soul seeming to riot within him for indignant rage.

But the unfeeling tyrant only laughed at his passion, promptly causing its repression by the undisguised threat—

“ Go to, go to, Master Roger, no more of thy

humours, nor any further hesitation, or we retract our leniency ; and once again forfeited," he nodded significantly, "by my troth, thou mayest look to Heaven for what mercy thou shalt find, for not a jot shalt thou have from me—to the hoard, old man, to the hoard."

He approached the hesitating miser—hesitating, perhaps, as much from exhaustion and pain as from reluctance, and, applying the point of his sword to the poor wretch's scorched extremities with a force that drew blood at each puncture, he soon compelled him to rise. The old man advanced a few paces towards the secret panel—the youthful watcher gave up all as lost—what else, indeed, could he have looked for? could human nature any longer resist so excruciating torments?—but that same moment the miser paused—'twas, however, but for that moment—he again advanced—actually stooped to undo the secret spring—again drew back. It seemed as if, even yet, he could not yield; as if, even yet, he hesitated to give up so deep a resentment—so dear a treasure.

"Ha!" exclaimed the impatient tyrant, at

the same moment advancing rapidly to where the miser stood, "'tis there, after all? beshrew me, if I thought not so—come, speed thee, man, thy tardy movements weary us," and, as he spoke, he rudely pushed the old man forwards.

Mallet resisted not the impetus, he slowly knelt down by the panel, and appeared to be seeking for the hidden spring; his persecutor seemed excited with expectation, and to exult for the certain success of his cruelty; he threw down his sword, and, leaning over the tardy miser, impatiently watched his proceedings, the two ruffians standing carelessly at the further extremity of the apartment.

This seemed the moment for which the poor wretch had so long waited; bracing his remaining strength, to which, feeble as were its best efforts, despair gave effect, he darted suddenly on the unsuspecting tyrant, and, fastening his withered hands on his neck, held him with so firm a gripe, that John's first efforts failed to release him, and in a few brief moments he was beyond the power to resist.

The tyrant's struggles grew weaker and weaker, his convulsive throes almost ceased, and a death-rattle gurgled in his throat, when his trusty protectors, who had so far looked calmly on, pausing in the unsatisfying doubt whether their master's death would be a gain or a loss to them, and now decided in their opinion, as well by the risk of even yet gaining possession of the fancied treasure, as its questionable existence, rushed swiftly forwards to his assistance, and attempted to unloose the old man's grasp. But it resisted their strongest efforts, it seemed fixed by so firm a despair, that not even their brutal strength could remove it.

There was no time for hesitation, the tyrant was even now insensible, and in another moment he might be beyond their help—already was the greedy sword of Jamy thrice through the miser's heart, and the old man's palsied hands, after a last death-struggle, as if his life quitted him sooner than his revenge, fell nerveless from their grasp, and released the royal ruffian from his so imminent peril.

But Albert saw no more—overcome with horror he sunk back insensible, ere that savage blow had been yet repeated, or the poor victim's life's blood had flowed upon the ground.

How long his swoon continued he knew not, but it seemed long and deep, ere a loud and repeated knocking aroused him. He looked wildly round—his first glance explained to him his horrible situation, and he eagerly sought, by the means of his former position, to gain an explanation of the knocking, which evidently came from the inner apartment; he looked fearfully through the window, for too well did he guess the sickening spectacle that awaited him.

The miser's dead body lay on the floor weltering in blood, near it sat the trembling tyrant, still but imperfectly recovered from his recent danger, and directing the strenuous exertions of his colleagues to break open the secret panel, which still resisted their scrutiny. Albert almost yielded to the apathy of despair, he remained some time still and motionless, scarcely, indeed, being aware that

he gazed on the destruction of his fondest wishes.

Some new hope seemed suddenly to rouse him from his stupor to active exertion ; he started from his gaze, and hurrying from that shuddering horror, passed quickly away.

## CHAPTER X.

“By the Lord, our plot is a good plot as ever was laid; our friends true and constant: a good plot, good friends, and full of expectation; an excellent plot—very good friends.”

*King Henry IV.*

THE adjourned meeting of the confederates was even more numerously attended than the previous one; several fresh associates had joined their party—whether from the removal of their worst objections by De Bourgh’s ready supply, or from the proclaimed grace and beauty of their youthful queen, did not appear; a better spirit, too, seemed to have existence. There was no longer that reserved caution and chilling hesitation, that had so



miserably checked their previous zeal, but generous devotion and warm enthusiasm seemed to animate the least fervent of their numbers.

De Bourgh's zealous soul was transported beyond measure at so happy a feeling ; instead of anxious arguments to excite their ardour, and spur them into useful energy, his more grateful task was now to repress the exuberance of their zeal, and rein in their too active transport within the bounds of prudence.

“ That our cause is good,” he exclaimed, checking Lord Moubray's earnest demand for instant measures, “ every just and generous soul must at once admit—that it has every promise of success, such good friends as I now behold, and the ardent zeal which shines around me, indisputably declare. Where, then, can we fail, when strength, and honour, and justice, and the bravest valour support us, and beauty—the sweetest, loveliest, smiles upon and approves our exertions? Oh! nowhere, my friends, is there even a doubt: let us but husband our strength, and wary caution direct our movements, and happiest fortunes must attend

us. My Lord of Northumberland's plan, which he has so ably explained to you, will be the basis of our operations; and, secure in the firm support of our royal ally, our fullest wishes must be well attained."

"I am well content, my good De Bourgh," returned the baron, "so that too long a delay do not deaden our present energy—zeal, we all know, is no stationary emotion; if it be not kept alive and excited by constant fuel, it soon exhausts itself, and even, like an un replenished fire, briefly burns away."

"True, Neville," rejoined De Bourgh, "but our zeal is in no fear of wasting, if, indeed, not from our own fault: instant and active exertions, can alone prepare for the struggle, and the needful provision for the future will well employ the present."

"And the sooner," added the Duke of Ramsay, "that we give ourselves to such preparations, the more effectual are likely to be our consequent operations."

"Then let us not longer tarry," exclaimed the impetuous Salisbury, advancing hastily

forwards; "to me, at least, active exertion is as soothing comfort—inactivity almost torture. Thou knowest my need, De Bourgh—Fitz-Arnulf has already declared his poverty, and scruples not again to admit, that, without efficient aid, his best wishes are without use; if, therefore, thy supply be as ready as Fitz-Arnulf's zeal, I for one require no further words, and well shall my deeds prove my earnest truth."

"Thanks, thanks, good Salisbury," returned De Bourgh; "may each illustrious soul around me burn with thy ardent zeal. Nor shalt thou long lack the needful means of prosecuting thy noble purpose; to-morrow shall the supply be dispensed to all our friends, that the cause sleep not, nor our energies be cramped by any wanting there."

"*To-morrow*," interrupted the Lord of Moubray, in a tone of evident disappointment, "I understood, De Bourgh, that even now, at this our meeting, should the means be ready; 'twere hard if our fond hopes, so happily excited,

should, after all, be crushed by any disappointment from that source."

"I thought the money was already in hand," exclaimed Robert de Ros, his lengthy features dropping some few degrees lower. "Was it not so stated, my Lord Salisbury?"

"Such was my belief, De Ros," returned the earl, in a hesitating voice. "Surely, De Bourgh, we were so given to understand?"

"Never, my lord," haughtily returned De Bourgh, at once annoyed at the imputation on his sincerity, and resenting the sordid feeling that still seemed, despite their noisy zeal, to rule the adherence of so many; "never, even by silent admission, have I sanctioned such a belief—not, however, that the 'money is less secure to us, for, were it necessary, in a brief space, indeed, could I produce it: had I thought, after the clamorous avowals which so lately filled these walls, that the uncertain devotion of so many existed on no better basis than sordid interest, I had not failed, even now, to have brought with me the exciting god of their wordy loyalty."

“De Bourgh, De Bourgh,” anxiously entreated the less vehement De Lusignan, “thy warmth is over quick — let not any hasty reproach, even if merited, disturb our harmony.”

“Thou art certainly in error, my good De Bourgh,” added the Duke of Ramsay; “for myself I want not thy aids, nor would any portion of the supply come even indirectly to my use, but, most assuredly, I believed that already was the money in thine hands; and even were there less foundation for the belief, ’tis hard to condemn so many of our friends for an anxiety, which their necessities, and not any selfish hope of advantage, make so urgent.”

“I *was* hasty, Fitz-Alan,” promptly admitted the warm-hearted veteran, whose quick anger was only surpassed by his prompt admission of it, when it led him into any error, “petulant—foolish—forgive me, Neville—De Ros, forgive me—let not an unadvised word give rise to any unkind thoughts in your hearts.”

“I care not,” sullenly replied De Ros,

"though 'tis not exactly the way to further the cause."

"It were better, De Bourgh," added the baron, in scarcely more contented mood, "hadst thou pre-considered thy words ere thou permittedst them utterance—'tis easier to avoid the cut, than heal the wound when once inflicted."

"Come, come, Neville," returned De Bourgh, "dispel the anger from thy brow, we know thee true and devoted to us, and cannot suffer any declension in thy thoughts; come, thy hand, Moubray—and thine, De Ros."

"I like thy zeal well enough, De Bourgh," observed the baron, as he accepted his pledge of reconciliation, "but it were more useful if somewhat tempered by discretion—sterling gold no doubt is good, but it is far more serviceable, when worked by skilful hands."

"And suited to occasions, Master Neville," added De Ros. "I thought our co-operation was only asked on the condition of our wants being satisfied?"

"As well they shall be satisfied" — De

Bourgh seemed to feel the taunt, though he avoided shewing it—"but let it pass, my good friends—let it pass."

"Ay, let it pass," added old De Vescey, who seemed little to relish the misunderstanding, or the time that was thereby lost; "let better thoughts be in our hearts, and better images before us, than these angry looks. Where is our fair queen, the young and lovely Marie? why is our meeting so long debarred an influence, which, as the glorious sun, shines pleasure to our hearts, and invigorates our spirits with the animating life, that beauty and princely grace ever beam on generous souls?—De Bourgh, withhold not longer that meridian brightness from our sight."

"Bravo, De Vescey," exclaimed the Duke of Ramsay, "thy ancient gallantry shames our colder youth; heartily do I join thee in thy call, for sweeter majesty never smiled on delighted duty."

"The queen, the queen!" called out some score of voices at once, as if impatient of any longer delay.

The sincere delight and fervent zeal, which so indisputably marked this eager cry, seemed to warm the faithful De Bourgh's heart beyond the feeling of his late indignation, or the remembrance of the bitterness to which its expression had given rise; contented pleasure seemed alone in his heart, as looking proudly round, he replied, as soon as the transport had in some measure abated—

“Well may you exult, my friends—well may you send forth your loud admiration of so fair, so lovely a queen, which had you not done, the very walls around you would have proclaimed. Willingly will her grace conform to your wishes, though, not being prepared for such a request, a short delay must necessarily intervene ere she can content your impatience—I go, however, to make known to her highness so gratifying a desire.”

“Do, good De Bourgh,” rejoined the zealous De Vescey, “and add to her sweet grace, our ardent and united duty.”

“I will, I will, my good De Vescey,” re-



turned De Bourgh, and he retired on his grateful mission.

He was many minutes absent, during which the low hum of pleased expectation, rather than any more vehement emotion, seemed to maintain in the assembly, as if their warmer feelings were repressed to welcome with more effectual transport their young princess' appearance.

Still De Bourgh tarried — little did they brook the delay ; again and again were their eyes turned to the door by which the veteran had disappeared, as their wishes rather than any certain sign betokened his return. At length the door was opened ; instantly did eager expectation fix its intensest gaze ; it was De Bourgh indeed who appeared, but only De Bourgh—no fairer, brighter influence attended him, and his look seemed troubled and perplexed.

The expression of the gazers passed at once from expectation to surprise, as in silent impatience they waited for the veteran's words.

“ Her highness,” hurriedly observed De

Bourgh, desirous at once to satisfy the evident anxiety, "has not yet arrived—I fear there has been some misunderstanding—I have, however, despatched a messenger, with the expression of your earnest wishes, and no doubt a brief time will enable her still to gratify them."

But simple as was his explanation, and satisfactorily as the delay of their anxiety seemed accounted for, De Bourgh's manner in no respect confirmed his words; he seemed absent and ill at ease, and in place of replying to the many inquiries put to him, with any better satisfaction, or even listening to them with attention, he appeared to be lost in his own thoughts, impatient even to be disturbed from them, and the anxious attempts which he made to divert the general notice from his disorder, only laid him more open to curiosity.

"Methought, my lord," insidiously inquired the uncertain Moubray of their ghostly host, "that thy castle had been our princess' dwelling:—when so many amongst us would deem her residence an honour to their poor halls, 'twere

hard that any inconvenience should attend her grace through ignorance of her plans."

"My Lord of Moubray," briefly replied the bishop, "whatever considerate duty could suggest has been already tendered."

"Hugh Neville ought to know," rejoined De Bourgh, starting as if from a trance, "that in projects of so secret a nature as ours, the most wary caution must mark each smallest step, and even princes submit to many inconveniencies."

"True, De Bourgh," returned the pertinaacious baron, "it was that very respect for privacy which induced my observation; methinks her grace's safety were much better secured by our attending upon her highness, than her highness upon us."

"Do, Neville, cease such idle objections," hastily returned De Bourgh, his present humour teased out of its scanty self-command, by Moubray's harassing surmises. "So long as the queen's safety is secured and her grace is content, what matters it how the result is produced? I fear, Neville, 'tis from little wish

for real satisfaction, that thou statest thy opinions."

"Again, De Bourgh," angrily retorted the baron, "again dost thou doubt me?"

"Peace, peace," entreated the conciliatory De Lusignan, "our zealous De Bourgh is evidently but ill at ease, and his wonted possession supports him not."

"Blame not me or my temper," hastily interrupted De Bourgh, casting all soothing thoughts even farther from him, "the fault rests not with me—if indeed—"

Perhaps it were well for De Bourgh, as happy for a cause so dear to him, that ere he had finished that ireful sentence, a hasty summons called him from the meeting; sufficient ill-humour indeed seemed already excited, and the clear smiling sky in which they had but just exulted, to be so soon and so sadly obscured by dense and angry clouds, that little fresh provocation was wanted to pour forth the lightning's flash, and spread unhealing wounds and quick devastation around.

Enough indeed of resentment, and even more

of disappointment remained when De Bourgh had gone—enough to repress even the warmest zeal—enough to stagnate confidence, increase doubt, and turn the scale of wavering hesitation against that boasted cause, which but a brief hour before had been proclaimed their proudest, dearest hope.

There was indeed but one expectation left, even in the most devoted hearts—for it seemed the only restoring influence that could now avail—that their young princess' prompt appearance amongst them might again animate their wasted zeal, and charm them from their moody apathy and sullen wrath, into pleased content.

But still the princess came not—and the moody disappointment still continued—and discontent still hung heavy over the minds of those expecting ones—and zeal and devotion and transport were no longer thought of—but doubt and dark surmisings and secret fears grew thickly, choking the very breath of promise—the mere chance of better things. Even as a goodly garden was that changed meeting, brought by the careful hand of skill to fullest

perfection ; the presiding eye was withdrawn—the dearest, most fondly-prized fruits, now almost at such sweet maturity, were nipped from their stem by a cold and cutting blast—no sun shone on that drooping land—no cheering influence snatched its withering promise from so greedy destruction, but all good fruits faded fast away, rankest weeds grew apace—and it had become a wilderness.

But a far more fatal ruin had come over this garden of so anxious, so earnest zeal—resentment and bitterest wrath dashed past the less ruthless destruction and rendered its desolation, even yet more desolate.

But still the princess came not, nor did even De Bourgh return—strange looks passed freely about, stranger thoughts had existence ; even mistrust and suspected treachery intruded into the minds of some, and doubting wonder pervaded all. Each viewed his neighbour askance, as if afraid to gain a confirmation of his fears, or betray his apprehensions, and a moody calm and sullen discontent seemed to wait for some explanation of the mystery.

"Apply not to me," exclaimed De Lusignan, perceiving that many inquiring glances were fixed upon him, and feeling, from his known devotion to the cause, that he might, with reason, be supposed able to give the required explanation; "equally with yourselves am I ignorant of the cause of this unhappy disappointment, as of De Bourgh's strange absence from our assembly."

"As also I," rejoined their reverend host, "must disclaim all better knowledge: I certainly was given to understand that her highness would be here, and had in consequence prepared all suitable accommodations."

"'Tis certainly inexplicable," added the Duke of Ramsay, "but a few minutes' patience may perhaps give us a better satisfaction."

"I fear not," objected the suspicious and resentful Moubray; "if I am not egregiously at fault, De Bourgh will neither return, nor will his princess again favour us with her gracious presence."

"His princess, Neville!" exclaimed Lord

Salisbury, starting with astonishment, "what do thy words imply?"

"Time will shew," returned the baron, with most unsatisfactory brevity.

"Forbear, Neville," indignantly interrupted De Vescey, his aged features beaming with the admiration which his mistress' beauty had caused—"thy words are treason to truth, and a lie to the fairest majesty; pollute not thy lips with a suggestion so vile,—I were unworthy the name of true knight did I stand by and hear so much loveliness, and so sweet grace, so monstrously traduced."

"Peace, peace, De Vescey," entreated De Lusignan, alarmed at the angry violence that seemed ready to burst forth; "Lord Moubray means not, as thy jealous warmth suggests; still give a little patience, and all will yet be well."

His earnest entreaty in some measure repressed their hasty wrath, and soothed their impatience from its more turbulent restlessness, and they again waited; but with no better result, still De Bourgh returned not—still the princess did not appear.



Expectation wearied—discontent was not longer to be endured—even devotion languished—one by one did the lukewarm spirits slink from the assembly—now less doubting members disappeared—now even true and devoted hearts yielded to continued disappointment—at length, even zeal submitted; and there was no one left—not even the faithful De Lusignan could resist the bitter disappointment—even his firm, unflinching loyalty resisted not a mystery, as unexpected as inexplicable.

## CHAPTER XI.

"I listened, but I could not hear,  
I called, for I was wild with fear ;  
I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread  
Would not be thus admonished.  
I called, and thought I heard a sound—"

*Prisoner of Chillon.*

WHEN De Bourgh received the message that called him from the hall, his immediate impression was that the princess, whose absence had so alarmed him, had suddenly arrived ; and buoyed up with the hope of the happy effect of her so opportune appearance on the spirits of the meeting, and rejoiced, as well to avoid

the certain explosion to which his own disorder and Moubray's persisted petulance so evidently tended, as to escape the intrusive curiosity to which his unsettled spirits had given rise, he gladly obeyed the summons, and sought the inquirer with the quick alacrity of hope.

A cruel disappointment awaited him—it was the trembling Albert who had sent for him. Pale and horror-struck with the inhuman cruelty which he had witnessed, fainting with dread, lest the prepared treasure, well-known to him as the very soul of their enterprise, should fall into the hands of their arch enemy, and its strength be turned against them; he had rushed from the fatal scene to seek De Bourgh, that if possible, even yet, his fervent zeal and quick judgment might devise some prompt means to arrest the dreaded blow, and, even yet, save their fond hopes from so ruthless a destruction.

De Bourgh was paralyzed with the sudden desolation—the believed certainty of that treasure's possession, and its now so imminent risk

—the indispensable need of its aid, doubly declared by the evening's events, and the pitiless ruin that was ready to crush those fondly prized, long-cherished plans, to the furtherance of which his existence had been given, so overwhelmed him, that for a time he was lost in a stupor of anguish.

It was of no avail attempting to conceal their danger—it was far too extreme—too certain; and yet he moved not from that apathy of woe—its very excess kept him without the power to move; he gazed fixedly—it seemed almost without a consciousness that he so gazed on the sad countenance of his young companion, whose fearful despondency awaited his decision, as if on his words alone, hung the power to snatch him from despair. But not even his distraction roused the veteran from his stupor, and Albert dared not ask—it seemed as if doubt, and perplexity, and despair, depressed the very idea of even an attempt to stay the rushing ruin.

At length De Bourgh started violently from

his reverie, his whole feelings seemed centred in one object.

“Still,” he impetuously exclaimed, “will we not quit our hope without some attempt at rescue—on with me, my child—even yet we may not be too late, and this cruel disappointment still be averted.”

He promptly hurried away, closely followed by Albert, who, in the mere attempt felt some re-assurance, faint and unsatisfactory as it was.

Their number was speedily increased by two of De Bourgh’s retainers, whom, as he quitted the castle, he signed to accompany him; and hurrying on, as swiftly as their most anxious fears could carry them, they soon reached the neighbourhood of the miser’s dwelling.

It was now dark, and heedless as were their movements of all caution and circumspection, the dark veil of night had so covered their proceedings, that, thus far, they seemed to have passed unnoticed.

No sooner, however, had they turned down the narrow street that led to Mallet’s habitation, than feeling more secure from any casual observation

through its very obscurity, De Bourgh paused to direct the further proceedings of the party :

“ Albert,” he briefly addressed him, “ do thou remain by the door, and advise us should any fresh intruders appear ; Marco, Ilbert,” turning to his attendants, “ do you instantly in with me, and let your bravest hearts go with you—spare not the wretches whom I shall deliver into your hands, but let your quickest blow be dealt upon their guilty heads, and the work be surely done—let us speed on.”

He turned as he spoke, and led rapidly forwards.

Arrived at the miser's house, he paused not long for scrutiny ; the door was still open, as Albert had left it, and they at once entered, leaving him on the watch outside, and cautiously bolting the door, as if that struggle should be without retreat, and they would secure their purpose, or perish in the attempt.

Oh ! what anxious—what torturing moments were those, as that eager listener told each passing one, and his trembling suspense made each appear an age of sickening anguish ! His

intensest hearing, for a time, failed to catch any sound from within—that stillness was even worse than suspense—that pause more appalling than the fearful clang of arms, and the dying wail of expiring men. Then came indeed a sound, as of a loud crash, a rush, a short but violent struggle, and then a dull, heavy fall—Albert breathed not—his eager desire to learn what next would follow, so condensed his whole feeling in the acute listening, wherewith he waited that anxious moment, that it was agony to his brain : but all was still, the moment passed, and then another and another—still all was silent—no further tumult, or struggling, or wails followed that fearful, that death-like rush. Albert could scarcely endure his sensations, he climbed eagerly to the grated window of the apartment, where his feelings told him that De Bourgh must be ; but all was dark, the fire, indeed, was not wholly extinguished, but its faint embers failed to discover to him any certain objects ; dark images passed to and fro before it, but so indistinct did they appear, that they betrayed not, even to his

eager anxiety, the merest sign of what was actually passing. He dropped again to the ground, and again placing his ear to the door, sought to gain some better satisfaction. But still all was silent, and his horrible suspense not only continued but increased each moment that he listened. What was that brief, that ominous struggle? was it hope or despair? Some one, beyond doubt, had fallen, and perfect, indeed, had been the blow that had struck him to the ground. Who was the victim? It was a shuddering question that almost convulsed the inquirer who asked it. Could it be De Bourgh? Oh no! had so horrible a destruction fallen upon him, the fatal truth were long since declared by his attendants—and if not De Bourgh, who then—was it possible that the bloody usurper had fallen, and a just retribution overtaken him?—His quick pulse, his throbbing temples evinced the intensity of his feelings, as he thought on the possibility of such an event, and the happy consequences of the tyrant's destruction. He scarcely dared to think of so unlooked-for a consummation, though even yet he had little to



divert such imaginings, save, indeed, the continued, almost death-like silence which had succeeded to that brief struggle, and seemed to mock his hopes with its so unaccountable strangeness.

He still listened with all the earnestness that so excited sensations could not but induce, but even his acutest hearing failed to detect the merest sign of any better satisfaction. Occasionally, indeed, the sound of footsteps for a moment reached him, but their calm and measured tread rather increased than lessened his perplexity, and but added fresh torment to his feverish restlessness.

At this moment some one passed hurriedly up the street; Albert's attention was so entirely engrossed, that he noticed it not, until now the intruder was close to him: he had just time to dispose himself nearer to the door, that thereby his slight figure might not be observable, when the step paused immediately opposite, and the next moment seemed cautiously to be approaching him.

Albert felt that he was discovered; his face

for better concealment, was turned to the door, and he failed to discern who it was that approached; self-preservation, however, caused him instantly to start round, and that same quick movement seemed to alarm the intruder, as, almost in an instant, he sprung back, and ran hastily down the street.

But that short glance, brief as it was, even in the darkness through which it reached him, discovered to him the hated features of the spy De Laci; and instantly did a new train of ideas perplex him. Had not his own person also been betrayed to the page—even as his? was his first question—and if so, what the certain consequences of such a contingency? but he soon rejected the idea as altogether improbable from his more obscure position by the deep door-way; he rather thought of the quick assistance which he would be sure to bring, should his master really be in the house, as his coming and his prompt flight seemed so strongly to declare, and the certain destruction which would in consequence fall on De Bourgh.

Anxious for his foster parent's safety, and

indifferent of his own, Albert knocked loudly at the door. Instantly was it opened, but no enemy appeared ; De Bourgh himself opened it—*that* fear was at an end—but other fears repressed the joyful pleasure which Albert felt on learning his safety ; he dared not, indeed, ask the satisfying of his suspense—an explanation of those fearful sounds—now, that its removal was in his power, a continuance of that suspense seemed less burthensome than the fatal ruin which its satisfaction might declare. He gave not De Bourgh, indeed, opportunity to explain, but, as if wishful to stay the uncertain fact, hurriedly exclaimed,

“ Haste, haste, dear father, our enemies lurk around us—even now will they overwhelm us—oh ! fly, fly from this fearful place, while yet you may escape destruction.”

De Bourgh seemed scarcely to understand his words, as if, indeed, he listened not to his so earnest entreaty.

Albert's agitation became stronger and stronger, his fears almost choked him, as he still further implored ;—

"Oh, tarry not, my father, wait not a certain and a cruel death, but at once fly, and—" he suddenly paused—his utterance seemed to fail him—his emotions no longer to be controlled—he faintly added, in a voice trembling with convulsive agitation, "Is it so, Hubert? are we, indeed, too late?"

"For hope, indeed, too late."—De Bourgh's changed and hollow tone affrighted his hearer even more than his words—"for desolation abundantly in time"—he struggled with his anguish, ere he added—"the treasure is gone."

Albert spoke not—staggered not—as this fatal announcement reached him, and he learnt the destruction of his dearest hopes, the annihilation of his almost accomplished desires—already had he too truly guessed that ruthless fate. The blow seemed too sudden, too excessive, as if too intense for his mind to comprehend its full desolation. Alas! 'tis no ideal picture that we sketch of that lethargy of woe, that deep trance of agony, wherein the child of misery sinks unresistingly, when her fondest, most adored object is snatched suddenly away,

and her joy—her hope—the very purpose of her existence—nay, her life's self, which this moment warmed her soul with light, and heat, and happiness, is the next no more; and the sudden blow—even as the inky midnight that would follow the instant quenching of a noon-day sun, plunges the wandering soul into a denser, even more incomprehensible darkness. Oh! sad is that fearful calm—that cold, cheerless blank—that unmoved insensibility—whose glazed, listless eyes wander uncertainly about, or fixed on empty space, seem not to ask, not even to wish for an explanation of its wretchedness; as if that blank were joy to the “hopeless, helpless, broken-heartedness of woe,” that awaits it; and that mental ignorance were elysium to the day of searching grief that light alone could dawn upon it—such a desolation have we witnessed, such a desolation must many have witnessed, to whom sorrow is familiar and calamity not unknown.

It was in such strange oppression of feeling that Albert still remained transfixed, and from which De Bourgh for a time sought not to rouse him; his own emotions, indeed, though

not so overwhelming, were sufficiently afflicting, and the wretched perplexity into which so unlooked-for a destruction of their projects had cast him, at a time too, when its last expectations seemed secured, so bewildered his every inquiry with doubt and hesitation, that he knew not, could not even guess at a plan for their procedure; and his unsatisfactory inquiries so absorbed his faculties, that he scarcely felt that his maturer fortitude should seek to support and cheer the weaker strength of his more youthful companion.

Perhaps he would have spoken, had there been one comfort in his heart, or even one promise in his thoughts; but all was there dark and dismal enough—Albert's fellest despondency scarcely could be more gloomy. He felt not indeed the cutting disappointment, as youthful ardour feels disappointment; nor, dear as was the cause to his soul, was it yet so dear as to that young heart; but still he saw farther, experience taught him to judge better, and the knowledge of the uncertain zeal of their friends, and of their prompt declension, did not

the needful aids at once appear, so convinced him of the sad and fatal ruin that had fallen on their hopes, that his feelings were, perhaps, almost as intense. So intense, indeed, were they, as to render him indifferent even to the imperative necessity of his prompt return to the meeting, where his presence was so essential, as also unmindful of the imminent danger that attended their continued delay where they now were. He started suddenly from his trance—some distant sound seemed to reach his tutored ears—he eagerly seized the youth's hand, and spoke hastily to him—

“Albert, we must hence—destruction is even now upon us—and I have sworn to secure thy safety at any price—come, let us begone.”

“And the tyrant, Hubert?” hurriedly demanded the youth, moving not at his summons, as if heedless of their peril, or that he felt, knew nothing but his own intense thoughts—“has he too escaped?—did I not hear a groan?”

“’Twas not *his*, Albert,” quickly returned his protector, drawing him still nearer to him. “Alas! no such fortune has attended our hopes,

—'twas but the ruffian Nierenuit, left by his master to remove all traces of his visit—would, indeed, our vengeance had fallen on a better head—but alas ! our enemy has escaped, and too miserably has he foiled us. But hark ! danger still more nearly approaches us—quick, Albert ! Marco ! Ilbert !” calling to his attendants, “haste away—there is no time for further quest—follow for your lives.”

He led the way in the contrary direction to that from which footsteps now swiftly neared them, and assisting Albert over a low wall, at once secured their escape while yet the friendly darkness concealed them.

De Bourgh waited a moment to be assured that his alarm was no unreal one, and not until the quick footsteps of many men passed with confused haste into the miser's house, did he lead his party away, and by a private path soon placed them beyond the risk of danger.



## CHAPTER XII.

"Dearly bought, the hidden treasure  
Finer feelings can bestow ;  
Chords that vibrate sweetest pleasure  
Thrill the deepest notes of woe."

BURNS.

No sooner had De Bourgh bestowed his young companion in safety, than, without waiting for the poor chance of consoling him, his abject despondency seeming, indeed, beyond any comfort—he suddenly quitted him, as if wishful that his mind should become accustomed to the affliction, by its mere continuance, ere he sought to rouse him from his grief, by any palliative suggestions.

Albert threw himself on his couch, as De Bourgh retired from his apartment, and gave himself to despair ; he lay unconscious to every thing, save the calamity which, like a sea of destruction, had wrecked his fond hopes and buried him in its waves, nor knew he the passing hours, nor that it was now day, nor that noon had come ; and perhaps his strongest feeling, when De Bourgh roused him from his lethargy, was surprise that the day was so far advanced.

For some moments he gazed uncertainly in the veteran's face, and then, as his more cheerful tone and less depressed manner, seemed to promise even yet a hope to their despairing cause, he started vehemently from his couch, demanding with an excitement, whose very intenseness was anguish—

“ Oh ! Hubert, hast thou yet a comfort for me ? is there yet, indeed, a remedy ? speak to me, dear father.”

“ Patience, my good child,” promptly returned De Bourgh, at the same time seeking, by his manner, to moderate his anxiety ; “ res-

train your feelings—I have some comfort for you, even in the ruthless disappointment that has come over us.”

“Then, oh! speak it,” impetuously entreated the youth, “dear Hubert, if thou hast a comfort—be it never so small, keep it not from me. I have no friend but thee, Hubert—thou art to me, as—” his feelings struggled within him—a thousand fond imaginations rushed through his mind, as the dear ties wherewith affection and love had so abundantly blessed him, warmed his fainting heart, and he thought how miserably he was now debarred their soothing consolations. The hesitating tide of grief was filled up, the gushing tears no longer pent themselves within the replete storehouse, but bursting violently forth, he threw himself on the veteran’s neck and wept aloud.

“Would, my dear child,”—De Bourgh waited but for the first gush of that anguish, ere his parental accents sought to soothe his affliction—“would that I could be even as thy heart’s fondest consolation, or that my words

had more in them of promise, than truth, alas ! permits ; but still, Albert, cheer up—miserable as is our disappointment, all is not thereby lost ; and if we may not seek the attainment of our wishes by so direct and instant a route, we may still attain to it, perhaps as securely, though by a more circuitous one.”

“Go on, go on, Hubert,” entreated his eager listener, whose anxiety to learn his plans, had already repressed that quick tide of grief ; “what has your active fidelity devised for our relief ?”

“I have not been idle, Albert, since I last night quitted you,”—De Bourgh’s harassed appearance, bespoke the mental, if not bodily exertions, that had occupied him ;—“I have already seen most of the confederates, and made known to them a casualty which is now irretrievable ; and with almost all of them existed the same opinion, ere my own judgment had suggested it, that, for the present, the projected insurrection on this side the water must be abandoned, and every possible means, which in the absence of the needful supplies

can be made effectual, be concentrated to assist the operations of the French arms. Feeble, as upon the test, has proved so great a portion of the zeal upon which we trusted; I still believe that a thought of treachery has not existence with any one individual; even the wavering Moubray remains with us, though for the present an useless associate; while the noble Ramsay, the furious Salisbury, and many of the proudest spirits, who graced our assembly, still go along with us—even against necessity will they fight for us—and be our first operations but successful, instantly will all those hesitating ones stand forth on our behalf. Where therefore all cannot be gained that we desire, 'twere well to secure as much as is attainable, and I have gladly closed with such an arrangement."

"And your instant plans, Hubert," impatiently inquired his young companion, as if anxious to gain some more personal satisfaction, "how will they decide our movements?"

"For myself, Albert," calmly returned the

veteran, "I shall still abide near this usurping tyrant, believing that, by such a course, I can better assist my prince, and also be more at hand to stir up the slumbering spirits of our friends, when the happy crisis shall arrive."

"And I, Hubert," impetuously interrupted the youth; "oh! say, is this fearful banishment yet to be mine? am I still to endure its horrible torment? Alas! alas! what a misery has it been to me! how useless—how without return, its endurance!"

"Poor child!"—the veteran sighed deeply as he spoke,—“indeed, indeed, I pity thee—nor would I add to thy troubles by any needless trial—”

"Speak out," entreated Albert, perceiving that he hesitated, "I can bear to hear of any fresh trial that awaits me, nor will I shrink from it, be it even more appalling than those I have already endured—for I have vowed never again to return to peace and joy, until I have accomplished all that my poor strength can tend to."

"Little indeed now is left for thee, my child,

ere thy vow is well complete, and thou mayest return to joy and peace—even to thine own dearest peace, with thy soul's fullest content ; but still, Albert, there is *one* purpose of thy coming not yet answered, and still within thy attainment. The princess Eleanor's safety and deliverance can only be promptly secured through your means."

"Ha !" quickly interrupted the youth, "in my bitter disappointment, I had almost forgotten poor Eleanor—oh ! willingly would I encounter any peril to take her away in safety ! What, Hubert, doth thy better judgment suggest for the accomplishment of so dear a purpose ?"

"Thy instant return, Albert, to the tyrant's den, the poor princess' prison,"—De Bourgh watched anxiously the youth's countenance—"canst thou yet—after all thy trials—and notwithstanding thy present weakness, attempt such a work, where one error or one single want of circumspection may be death ? Thou knowest the difficulties of the attempt, my child—darest thou try it ?"

“ Oh ! yes, willingly, Hubert,”—the youth spoke with animation—“ and without fear—I cannot fail to deliver her from her bondage.”

“ But it must be instantly done, Albert ; the usurper’s plans are now, through this accursed fortune, prompt and decisive—even after to-morrow does the court commence its removal, and what is to be done, must be at once accomplished. The princess knows not of our disappointment, even yet thinks that success attends us, and it must be thy part instantly to seek her and make known our altered plans and the urgency of her instant flight. To her own direction mayest thou well trust her escape ; do thou but bid her join us here, and then tarry not longer, but even at the instant secure thine own safety. Only say, Albert, if thou hast any misgivings in thy mind—I would ~~not~~ have thee rush into any needless danger—it is possible that the end may be attained by other means.”

“ That, Hubert, shall not be,” vehemently interrupted the youth ; “ it shall never be said, that, for so dear a friend, I shrunk from any trial—though, good father, the mere idea of



again encountering this horrible murderer, which my return to the palace almost renders unavoidable, does indeed torture me."

"That torment, my poor child, I trust I have saved you from—already have I been to the tyrant and stated to him thy return, and thy intended resumption of thy service on the royal Isabella. John's schemes, and the innumerable demands on his attention, which his sudden removal calls for, leave it little likely that he will have a thought to spare on one so insignificant as a poor page."

"Then gladly do I go," quickly rejoined his listener; "I have no longer a fear, no longer one hesitation,"—he jumped to his feet—"even now let me proceed."

"Let it e'en be so, my child," mournfully replied De Bourgh; "thou canst not go too soon, each minute is precious—seek thy gracious mistress, and let thy apt tongue keep thee about her person, till an opportunity occurs to further thy purpose—but why attempt to direct you, my generous child, when your own experience will better lead you? God speed you,

Albert, well bless thine errand, and give thee every success !”

“ And accomplished, kind father, shall I no longer be kept from happier scenes ? will my pilgrimage be indeed at an end ?”

“ Even so, my child—and my pledge too at an end, when again thou art safely restored to his hands who committed thee to me.”

“ Oh, speak not of that bliss, Hubert,”—the youth spoke with wild emotion—“ the very thought of such a joy is ecstasy to my soul. Oh, never, never again shall such a sacrifice be extorted from me. No, Ambition ! thou cursed power, already hast thou cost me—what, oh ! what hast thou not cost me of torment and woe and anguish ! Oh, how far preferable were the lot of the meanest peasant, who eats his bread in contented obscurity, to that of the splendid misery to which ambition lures us, sapping our heart’s best feelings, and snatching from us the sweetest, best happiness of life—the happiness of affection ! Oh, what, Hubert, is the highest height of this world’s pomp—the very proudest of its honours to the grateful,

soothing rapture of domestic happiness? Oh, nothing—willingly, gladly would I yield up every claim to greatness for its sweet content.”

“Thou talkest simply, child,”—De Bourgh smiled at the youth’s earnestness—“greatness is not a thing to be despised, although rarely knows it so grateful a feeling as that of domestic enjoyment; pomp and grandeur ever have been and ever will be considered as the summum bonum of this world’s attainment.”

“But not with me, Hubert; I care not—I detest them—for are they not to me the preventing cause of a better, truer happiness?”

“In your present feelings, my poor child, it were perhaps folly to look for a different decision; but ’tis not the time to form an estimate of life or things, when passing events so strongly bias the judgment as your present trials bias your’s. There are times, Albert, when our dearest interests would be gladly sacrificed to escape the bitter tests to which their preservation compels us; but would cooler reflection approve of the sacrifice?

Would your own generous heart hereafter be content, were any present depression, or any failing weakness to induce you to shrink from that you believed to be your duty, and which might hereafter be proved to have been of lasting importance?"

"But I have not so shrunk, Hubert—I do not shrink from any ordeal; even with alacrity do I now seek renewed difficulty, for that my duty calls me—still, however, that duty does not ask me to repress those native feelings of my heart, which cause me to fly from the believed false, cheating promises of hated ambition, to the truer, beloved happiness which gentler scenes open to me. Surely, father, even thy stern judgment cannot condemn me for this?"

"Condemn thee, fond child! oh! no—be thou happy, even as thy heart wishes happiness. Little, indeed, do I value the highest rewards wherewith ambition can repay its proudest quest, for too truly have I fathomed the hollow falsehood, and feel how little real enjoyment attends its best recompense. And

yet if words of mine could brace you to attempt their attainment, my best eloquence should not be wanting. When, Albert, thy warm, untutored vision, saw nought but sunshine and smiling success before thee, then did I not seek to repress thy too ardent imaginations, and cool them with the unwelcome bitterness of the reality? even so, now, when disappointment and trouble cast you down below hope, would I rouse you from your depression by the brighter side of the picture. But still, Albert, the picture is the same—'tis only the vision that is altered—'tis the same worthless, unsatisfying cheat that we look upon—But a truce to reflections, which can but damp thy ardour without any better satisfaction."

"Be it so, Hubert, though there is little fear of any present want of zeal from any words of thine—a motive dearer than ambition, as beyond its fellest influence, urges me to the attempt, and I despise even its veriest difficulty."

Would your own generous heart hereafter be content, were any present depression, or any failing weakness to induce you to shrink from that you believed to be your duty, and which might hereafter be proved to have been of lasting importance?"

"But I have not so shrunk, Hubert—I do not shrink from any ordeal; even with alacrity do I now seek renewed difficulty, for that my duty calls me—still, however, that duty does not ask me to repress those native feelings of my heart, which cause me to fly from the believed false, cheating promises of hated ambition, to the truer, beloved happiness which gentler scenes open to me. Surely, father, even thy stern judgment cannot condemn me for this?"

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"Be it so, Hubert, though there is little fear of any present want of zeal from any words of thine—a motive dearer than ambition, as beyond its fellest influence, urges me to the attempt, and I despise even its veriest difficulty."

“Go, then, my noble creature, and be the full accomplishment of thy dearest wishes thy reward—Should any unlooked-for difficulty, Albert, confront you, the jester, Phœdrus, may be useful, even farther than you imagine; fail not, therefore, in such a case, to apply to him—he is a man of mystery, as well of words as of deeds, but he is a true and a loyal soul, and worthy your fullest confidence.”

“I have already,” returned the youth, “felt the benefit of the jester’s care—more than once has danger been avoided through his counsels; and I have, too, discerned that mystery and he are no strangers—methinks, indeed, Hubert, that the jester’s guise but ill conceals a nobler spirit.”

“Wherefore thine opinion, Albert?”—De Bourgh scrutinized his features as he made the inquiry. “Has the jester betrayed to thee any nearer confidence than thine own safety demanded? or dost thou but suspect his dissembling from the mere mystery of his conduct?”



“Simply from the latter cause, Hubert”—the youth in turn scrutinized his companion—  
“Phædrus has in no respect committed to me any secret—though if it please thee to make it known”—

“Go to, go to,” promptly interrupted De Bourgh, “I said not that there was any secret, nor even admitted any dissembling in the man—you are somewhat over hasty in your decision, my young friend—but come, speed you on your errand, I cannot give you any further respite. Most anxiously shall I wait your quick return, when we tarry but for the princess’ following you, ere we instantly fly from this accursed city, and all provision shall be well made for securing our safe and prompt escape from the English shore. Go, then, my child, and success and happiness go along with thee.”

He urged the youth’s departure, as if seeking, by his persevering earnestness, to prevent his again alluding to a subject

wherein he seemed to believe he had betrayed himself.

Albert saw through his motive, nor pressed the subject farther, and in a few moments he was on his way to the palace.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“ Ne’er did the chieftains of a warring state,  
Hear from the oracle their half-told fate  
With more religious fear, nor more suspense  
Than Albert now endur’d.”

BLOOMFIELD.

It required but little penetration to discover that the queen’s favour towards her young page had materially changed, since he had last stood before her, and her kind mediation had in some degree propitiated the king’s anger. Whether it was that the gentle Isabella had really withdrawn her preference from him, through the doubt of his truth, which her exposition of Maud’s words and John’s

suspicions, had created in her mind ; or that it was her own uneasy thoughts, wherewith the still vivid remembrance of the secret gallery tormented her ; or that her greater interest in the love-sick maiden, and her belief that Albert had trifled with her affections, occasioned her to look upon him, with no small dissatisfaction—whatever the cause, the queen met his humble duty with cold indifference, nor scarcely permitted to escape her even the consciousness that she noticed his return.

Such a reception was but little encouraging to Albert's anxious purposes ; he looked eagerly round the royal apartment, but even less satisfaction attended the inquiry ; the Princess Eleanor was absent, and the only attendant upon Isabella, the laughter-loving maiden, the Lady Thérèse—though now no longer smiling gaiety, nor evincing even one pleased emotion. It was sufficiently evident that some unpleasant influence pervaded the royal presence, and, as a heavy weight, depressed the mere sign of content or satisfaction.

Albert waited many minutes, as well to de-

cide how to proceed, as to give opportunity for any relenting kindness to soften the queen's disfavour into some better feeling towards him ; but she still continued bent upon her embroidery, nor noticed his many repeated attempts to gain her attention. He had however still waited on, patiently looking for her tardy notice, but for the instant purpose which so engrossed him, and which at once decided him to retire, and seek the object of his quest by other means. He was turning with such an intent, when Isabella, plainly evincing her meant inattention by the quickness of her present notice, exclaimed with far more bitterness than he had ever before heard from her gentle lips—

“What, young Sir, is thy duty already tired of waiting on our pleasure? cannot thy impatience tarry yet some few moments, until we deign to notice thy hollow service?”

“Most royal Madam,” readily returned the page, whose apt tongue, unprepared as he was for the queen's displeasure, did not fail him, “my humble and true service would gladly

wait ever on your highness, did not the dense clouds of anger so bitterly obscure the wonted brightness of your favour, that I sought to fly from a punishment I have not merited."

"Thou hast over many words, young Sir,"—the queen in no way relaxed the severity of her manner—"so glib a tongue seldom rules itself by the straight-forward dictates of sincerity; 'tis deceit that hangs on a wordy mouth, and falsehood that deals in loud and many professions. Even so has thy vaunted duty proved, and we have discerned thy warm devotion to us, to be as light as the breath that proclaimed it."

"My gracious mistress," fervently exclaimed Albert, for his heart told him not of one single insincerity towards this gentle being, whose kindness had bound his soul in deepest gratitude to her, "most grievously am I wronged in your thoughts; nor falsehood has ever from my lips, nor deceit been in my heart, when the gracious Isabella has been before me—too deeply, indeed, has your

grace's condescension bound me to you for ever."

"Cease, young Sir," quickly interrupted the queen, in an authoritative tone; "spare your empty words, for they no longer amuse us—had your gratitude indeed felt our willing favour, 'twould have been somewhat differently acknowledged, than by using our countenance to the furtherance of your ruthless purposes."

Albert started, his most determined self-command failed to conceal the impression which the queen's so direct accusation had made upon his conscious mind; and it was with no firm assurance, that, anxious to make some reply to the charge, he hurriedly exclaimed—

"Your grace speaks in enigmas—what are the purposes by which I have so abused your kind favour?"

"Pshaw, De Bourgh,"—the queen seemed even more annoyed—"this is pitiful—childish—when thine own conscience and embarrassment so plainly tell thee better than any words of mine; at least we expected not from thee such trifling as this."

Albert became still more perplexed—still more confused, as he eagerly inquired within himself, whether he was indeed discovered, and his disguise no longer concealed from her the falsehood and treachery, which, if not against her, he was practising, even as she had stated, against her husband—it mattered not how called for, how excused by every reasoning of justice was that deceit—to her so kind favour, and to his avowed, so often protested devotion, it was treachery, and for the moment he felt the sting of its guilt, even more than the danger which its discovery threatened.

Believing that the lying Laci had indeed recognized him while keeping watch the preceding night at the miser's door, and at once foreseeing the certain destruction in which he had plunged himself by returning to the palace, he was almost on the point of proclaiming his deception, of acknowledging his real character, and striving to move the queen's known pity, by pleading his cause before the only breast in which mercy existed in that horde of cruelty, and who could alone snatch him from the



remorseless destruction which seemed about to overwhelm him.

That same instant, when even now the words were on his lips, did the queen again address him :—

“Our favour had indeed judged better of thee, youth, and would too have well proved our estimation—but such wanton cruelty !—”

Albert drew back—her words seemed at once to stagger his purpose, as if their unsatisfactory and imperfect meaning made him even more uncertain of the real charge against him. Had she indeed spoken less of her accusation, or declared more of its nature, in either case he would have spoken ; in the former, no consciousness of his danger would have repressed his words—in the latter, guessing the true cause of her anger, he might have sought to propitiate it, or if beyond pardon, to have escaped its penalty through Isabella’s mercy—but this incomplete, half-expressed, uncertain charge kept him beyond any decision ; and taking refuge in silence, which if not tending to any escape, betrayed him not farther into danger, nor

risked the acknowledgment of any unsuspected offence, he remained mute, willing to incur the imputation of sullenness and obstinacy, rather than by any more ingenuous behaviour to run the chance of adding to his peril.

He soon observed that his silence annoyed the queen, nor was he sorry to mark her fresh cause of displeasure, hoping that thereby she might be betrayed into some less guarded and more distinct accusation. Nor was he mistaken in his judgment, Isabella repressed not long the expression of her annoyance ;—

“Least of all, young Sir, did we expect from one of thy believed candour, so perverse and persisted sullenness.”

“Your highness,” quickly exclaimed the youth, not sorry of an opportunity of breaking the silence, “what *can* your page reply ? already has your judgment condemned me—”

“No, De Bourgh,” the queen sharply interrupted him, at the same time motioning the Lady Therèse to withdraw, “we do not condemn thee ; strong as is our accusation, we

would still hear thy defence, did any better ingenuousness encourage our attempt."

"And gladly would I answer your grace"—Albert still carefully avoided any admission—"did I know the nature of your charge—" he waited with extremest anxiety her prompt reply.

"Hast thou not, De Bourgh, by insidious and false attentions, stolen the heart of my poor Maud, and then cruelly slighted her preference?"

Her words were almost as salvation to her listener—he at once breathed freely—his resolution returned, and he boldly replied—

"On my soul, royal Madam, I am not guilty of the offence—neither have I sought, much less have I slighted the poor maiden, whose unhappy lot and sadly-bestowed preference on so unworthy an object has been to me a source of cruel and most bitter regret. Surely the Lady Maud accuses me not thus—it is impossible that her gentle heart can so unjustly condemn me, when she so well knows I am innocent?"

"No, De Bourgh," promptly replied the queen, "the suffering Maud condemns thee, accuses thee not; but my calmer judgment condemns thee—for too surely do I see what her fond, misplaced affection prevents her seeing, that, even as I have declared, thou hast trifled with her weakness."

"Oh! no, royal Madam, 'twere out of my very nature so to injure her. Alas! your Grace I knew not of her preference till too late, and then—"

"Thou feignedst, boy, that thou couldst never return her attachment!"

"I *feigned* not, Madam—our affections go not at our beck—mine were already given."

"*Thine*, boy! so young in life—so old in love?"

"Ah! Madam, 'tis not with love as with life—our young affections but waste with maturing age; then prudence and a thousand repressing cautions cool their ardour; and rob them of their more generous fruits—'tis our first, our earliest budding emotions that are the dearest, the best, the most lasting, and

their deep impressions seldom yield to any later love."

"Cease, cease, fond youth,"—a tear trembled in her eye as Isabella spoke, some inward remembrance troubled her—she was silent: she wiped away the intrusive evidence of her sad regret—but another came, and another—Albert too well read her inmost soul, and saw the bitter pang that oppressed her gentle breast, as the memory of her own young affection burst upon her, and she turned from its sweet bright promise to the dull, cheerless gloom of her blighted existence. He saw it, and oh! sadly did he feel it, for too well did he know the power of true affection--too truly did he judge the bitter sting of disappointment.

At length the queen again addressed him—melancholy and meek resignation seemed to tinge her words with sadness, and smooth their previous asperity to gentler favour. She spoke hurriedly, but yet kindly.

"We no longer condemn thee, De Bourgh; mayest thou be as happy in thy affection as thou art in our favour, and ever as true and

as devoted to ourself as we wish to judge thee; for the present, however, leave us—we are indisposed.”

And she in vain sought to repress the emotions with which her sad remembrances still overpowered her.

Albert could not resist the warm sympathy wherewith her sorrowing regret filled his breast—the impulse to his fervent soul was irresistible—he seemed to forget his own anxieties, his own purposes, their relative conditions—nay, even his very self seemed to be forgotten in the quick impulse of that moment, as hastily advancing to the weeping Isabella, he took her hand and entreated—

“Dearest lady, be comforted—give not room to this searching sorrow—oh! let not—” he seemed struck with some sudden consciousness—a strange confusion seized him—he was silent.

The queen looked quickly up—amazement marked her features, as fixing her earnest gaze on the youth, she seemed lost in an almost equal confusion—not even did she withdraw

her hand from his presumptuous grasp, but still gazing on him with a look that seemed to search his inmost soul, she remained transfixed, as if wonder had paralyzed her.

As immoveable too was the daring page, whose strange disorder seemed not to know that his audacious hand held that of England's queen—he seemed troubled, indeed, though with no feeling of presumption—a deeper, more perplexing anxiety overwhelmed him, he sunk on his knee before the queen, and covering his face with his hands, awaited her indignation in speechless confusion.

It was some minutes ere Isabella addressed him, and then more in doubt than in anger.

“De Bourgh, thou art altogether inexplicable, and we know not whether to excuse thy ignorance or blame thy boldness.”

“Judge me,” fervently exclaimed the youth, at once rousing himself from his disorder, “even as it may please your grace—but do not deny the warm sympathy and fervent interest whereby is my offence.”

"We do acknowledge it, and would excuse thee," replied the queen, in a far more gracious manner, "nor needest thou pain thyself by any uneasy apprehensions of our anger—go in peace—we would be alone."

The queen motioned him to retire, a sign which Albert delayed not to obey; he turned indeed once, and thought how little comfort even majesty brought to an afflicted mind—how empty its vain show of happiness to a wounded spirit—and then as the fairer, surer promise which affection placed before him, passed through his mind as a good beyond the influence of any fortune, he almost ceased to feel the bitter disappointment which had so miserably marred his hopes, in the dearer prospect with which his speedy return to a better happiness delighted him.

Scarcely, however, had he quitted the queen's presence, than Isabella, notwithstanding her disorder and declared want of leisure, sought the Lady Maud, still unable, through her extreme depression, to attend upon her duty,



to make known to her Albert's return, and the hopeless result of their conference, striving at the same time to rouse her from her despondency, by the assurance of her own unchangeable affection.

Nor had she failed already to communicate to the Lady Thérèse, the strange surmises which Albert's inexplicable behaviour had given rise to, at the same time suggesting to the maiden the probability, that his young companions might be able to throw some light on the subject.

A suggestion which Thérèse did not fail to turn to instant account, and throwing herself, as if by chance, in young Laci's way, the more likely of any, from his opportunities, to satisfy her, she soon made known her suspicions, seeking to gain, from his better knowledge of the youth, some confirmation of her doubts; and if no satisfying result followed from the brief answers wherewith the wary page replied to her queries, enough was said by her to excite new fancies in De Laci's mind,

and to stimulate his resentful industry to renewed exertions, that even yet he might gratify his own malice, and his master's wishes, by the detection of Albert's believed duplicity.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"I will tell you why ;  
So shall my anticipation prevent your  
Discovery, and your secret moult no feather."

*Hamlet.*

No sooner had Albert retired from the queen's apartment, than feeling himself completely foiled in his plans through the Princess Eleanor's unusual absence from Isabella's person, and not daring to ask the cause of that absence from any one else, he at once determined to seek the jester, and ere he proceeded further, to ascertain whether the princess were unwell, as also if any material event

had occurred in the palace since he quitted it, and so prepare himself for every contingency.

Phœdrus, however, was not so soon found, and when at length he did meet with him, that same instant a casual glance made him conscious that the hated De Laci was watching him ; and not caring to give the youth any needless food for his ill-will, or subject either himself or poor Phœdrus to any fresh dangers through his malevolence, he was compelled to forego his purpose, without even acquainting the jester with his anxiety.

Not long afterwards he again sought him, but again did the intrusive page thwart his intention—again and again did the same difficulty occur—it seemed strange, that accident alone should have thus cast the youth in his way, and yet he could scarcely believe that there was any design in so unlooked for, so unaccountable a proceeding.

He still waited for an opportunity of evading his notice, and, had not time so much

pressed him, would have treated his impertinence, or whatever other feeling occasioned his intrusion, with the contempt it merited; but, as it was, the delay, which resulted by it to his plans, was so torturing, and its peril so imminent, that his patience at length failed, and he again issued forth from his chamber, determined boldly to challenge the youth, and if possible shame him out of his design. That same instant, however, the page had either relaxed his watch, or foregone his purpose; and Albert, glad to escape the certain trouble and doubtful issue of his intended questioning of the youth, quickly passed through the hall where Laci before had stationed himself, and gained the jester's quarters unperceived.

Phœdrus luckily was in the way, and without further preamble Albert stated the object of his visit, and begged its instant satisfaction.

"As to events, Master De Bourgh," returned the jester, in his wonted sing-song tone, "events are ever happening, though poor Phœ-

drus may have discerned them not—truly, the falcon's bells may have tingled, and the huntsman's horn have winded, and restless man sought to lose himself, his thoughts and passions, in the woodland pastime, and the jester have not heard thereof—proud men, indeed, have been, and cruel ones remain, but such events are not a jot strange, are ever happening as well in royal palaces as out of them—the question, therefore, would rather be, what wot ye to make a material event?”

“Phœdrus,” impatiently interrupted the anxious Albert, “extremest results await my instant proceedings—delay may be fatal to them, and yet on such niceties do they hang, that I dare not proceed, until I learn from you the exact situation of the royal household—trifle not, therefore, with me, but at once satisfy my anxiety, as far as thy knowledge permits; in a brief space, indeed, it were useless—no doubt, Phœdrus, already dost thou know that disappointment has blighted our fondest hopes.”

The jester started—extremest surprise marked his exclamation — “ Disappointment ! I thought the proudest promises beamed upon the cause ? ”

“ That fair sun, Phœdrus,” hurriedly returned the youth, “ no longer shines upon us ; a dense cloud, for the present at least, obscures our path—our best plans are thwarted, and the sudden disappointment distorts our every proceeding.”

The jester was silent ; he seemed distressed to an extreme by so unexpected an announcement, listening with eager attention to the short explanation which Albert gave of the pitiless fortune that had attended the confederacy. An entire change seemed to pass over him, as, in an altered tone, and a manner of excited earnestness, he suddenly interrupted the reserved, unsatisfactory statement which Albert’s caution thought sufficient for the occasion ;—

“ Young man, hesitate not in thy confidence, these are not times for any half-measures ; too

extreme, indeed, is our condition—and though I pretend not to the same interest in the cause, believe me, its welfare can scarcely be dearer to yourself than it is to my inmost soul.”

He paused in the expectation of Albert's more fully satisfying him; but the youth still hesitated—his mind, indeed, admitted Phœdrus' zeal and fidelity; and he also felt an inward conviction, that the jester both knew and was perhaps, in reality, far beyond the seeming of his office; but still he doubted, on so extreme a subject as that of the anxious purpose which engrossed him, the least mention of which might lead him to betray the princess's actual condition, and thereby, perhaps, compromise her safety, whether, even to one so assured to be devoted to their interest, it were prudent to explain to him his views more particularly than he had already done.

The jester waited not many moments for the still withheld satisfaction, ere he continued—

“I blame not your circumspection, young



man—though there are occasions when wariness is a fault, and e'en prudence as ungenerous as without benefit. Your anxious manner bespeaks too plainly the extreme interest that urges your inquiries—and would you lose my poor services through the small limit of the confidence, whereof you deem me worthy? No, too well must you—do you know, how little appearances bespeak the real character—already have I proved to you that I possess opportunities of knowledge beyond the ignoble badge that I have put on—perhaps am as much above my office, as is thyself above the seeming which circumstances compel you to submit to—as far from that thou believest me, as is your actual nature from that thou hast assumed."

Albert started with evident astonishment.

"Start not, fair Sir," continued the jester, with a peculiar emphasis, "there are many masks around us—cruelty and oppression almost constrain us to be hypocrites—perhaps life itself might be insecure even to the noblest vic-

tim, without a deceit even horrible to imagine"—Phœdrus advanced nearer to his listener, and bending towards him, whispered in his ear, "Thy purpose, young Sir, concerns the Princess Eleanor."

Albert gazed on the jester with speechless wonder—he seemed almost to doubt his senses, as if incredulity oppressed him beyond the power of any satisfaction—it was, indeed, above even his veriest surmise to imagine, how his most secret purposes should thus be known to the man, and more especially how the princess's assumed mask of mental alienation should have been declared to him, as his words so indisputably proclaimed. He looked upon Phœdrus almost with awe, as a being of supernatural knowledge—and his perplexing wonder kept him speechless.

"Said I not," continued the jester, in the same low whisper, "that deceit lurked around us, and disguise stalked forth, even at the right hand of majesty; and wouldest thou hear

more? more of thyself as of others? or are my credentials already contenting for thy tardy confidence?"

"Enough, and more than enough—" Albert spoke in a disordered tone—"thou unknown—mysterious—fearful man, whoever thou art, that in this mean guise tellest me of hidden things, which even majesty knows not, jealous tyranny has failed to discover, and little less than royalty could have declared to thee—who and what art thou?"

"That, young Sir," hurriedly returned the jester, "it matters not, save in my deeds; I am one, ready and devoted to serve you and yours. I may not, nor would time now permit me to say more—If I rightly understand thy purpose, and the princess's safety engages thy attention, speak, that I may best counsel and aid its accomplishment—let there be no longer reserve—there is no space for hesitation."

Albert did not hesitate longer, his own convictions from the jester's words, and more

especially De Bourgh's declaration of his truth and ability to assist their purposes, so contented his every scruple, that he at once admitted—

“Thou dost understand rightly, Phœdrus—it is the Princess Eleanor's safety, and her instant deliverance from this horrible bondage, that I seek with so anxious eagerness ; prompt, indeed, must it be, or it is too late. Oh ! canst thou aid me ?—already, from the princess's ill-omened absence from the queen's apartment, do unlooked-for difficulties thwart me, and I know not how to remedy them—speak to me, Phœdrus.”

“A severe indisposition has already confined the princess to her chamber these three days—its nature has in no way transpired, but from the heavy gloom that has hung over the whole household, I fear, even more than I dare to hint, that some, no common unpleasantness has occurred, and that her ailment is rather of the mind than the body.”

“And in such a case, Phœdrus, how are we

to proceed? delay is utterly impossible—and yet I see no plan of even communicating with the princess without almost a certainty of betraying both our plans and her disguise.”

“There is but one mode,” quickly answered the jester, “which circumstances leave for our adoption—as soon as night sets in, and the whole palace is safe in sleep, thou must to the princess’s chamber, and thyself declare thy purpose.”

“To her chamber, Phœdrus!” the youth repressed not his agitation—“think of her attendants—the certain destruction to her and us, should any fortuitous accident betray our steps—is there not a mean less fraught with peril that might suffice? nay, the princess’s mere surprise might discover us.”

“Leave all to me,” calmly returned the jester—“in extreme cases extreme measures must be had recourse to—retire thou to thy apartment, nor risk any further observation by again leaving it: expect me as soon as safety

permits me to come, and be ready instantly to proceed—even to flight from this accursed place, for mayhap the princess herself may secure our wishes sooner than thou suspectest. I will proclaim my coming by scratching gently at thy door, and, for fear of any surprise, thou hadst better close it to all other applications—we cannot be too wary.”

“ Especially when De Laci’s envenomed malice seems so much on the alert.”

“ Of all, indeed, thou hast need avoid him ; I know him to want but his master’s power to equal him in villany, and I know him, too, thy sworn, implacable enemy—shun him as thou wouldest a deadly viper, nor for any testy humour provoke his further rage—it already burns fiercely enough ; for thou hast provoked him with an offence beyond forgiveness, and of which thou hast not a suspicion, by being the favoured one of the Lady Maud’s affections.”

“ Is it possible ?”—Albert seemed amazed at so unthought-of an explanation of his enmity—

“and have I his busy rancour through that unhappy cause? Sad, miserable accident—to me, alas, how afflicting!”

“It is, indeed, so,” returned the jester; “the page had long sought to gain the maiden’s heart, and his jaundiced soul views his fancied rival with fiendish envy, that wanted not the tyrant’s commands to whet into never-sleeping malice—be sure thou notest him well.”

“Never fear me, Phœdrus, I have already profited by thy early caution of the youth, nor shall he have much beyond his own lying inventions to lay to my charge, and soon—oh! how soon do I hope to be safe beyond the power of his hatred.”

“But at least as far as this wretch is concerned, anticipate not thy deliverance—gain thy chamber as quickly and as stealthily as thou canst, and there wait patiently my coming.”

“My best patience, Phœdrus, will but be impatience. I will, however, in no respect forget thy advice.”

“ ’Twere indeed a pity if any inadvertency should mar a purpose so long and so anxiously sought, and now so near its attainment—but, depend upon it, I give you no needless caution.”

Albert tarried not longer, but at once quitted the jester, and with a lighter heart, for that his words had in them so much of promise and of comfort; he passed hastily towards his own apartment, and congratulated himself, as he entered it unmolested, on his escape from observation, especially from that of the page De Laci, whose notice he believed he again avoided, and who was still nowhere to be seen.

It had, perhaps, been well had he scrutinized his path more particularly than his anxious steps permitted him to do; he might then have detected that a scowling eye of malice was upon him, and noted his goings with the bitter exultation of contented rancour, as, in the further distance, the hated page tracked him almost from the very spot of his conference with



the jester. Laci had, indeed, relaxed his long persisted watch for a time, brief enough, but of which Albert had advantaged ; and, although mere chance again discovered him on his hurried return to his apartment, and he was foiled in the full accomplishment of his purpose, he readily guessed that some design of no common interest occupied the youth's attention, and, bursting with vexation at having been outwitted by him, he vowed even more determined industry to recompense himself for his present disappointment.

## CHAPTER XV.

"It must not be; before the tempest fly  
Hope's rainbow hues, and darkness shrouds the sky."

M. ROLLESTON.

It was an anxious and a torturing watch to which Albert now devoted himself, for not only was his purpose so extreme, and the time of its accomplishment so confined, but the execution of his wishes seemed to hang on so many and so various accidents, that his heart almost misgave him as he thought of it; and when hour after hour passed away, and the jester came not, his suspense became in its endurance,

almost a fever of excitement. But still, slow as crept each tardy hour, midnight had already long since passed and the morning dawn came quickly on, without bringing him the expected summons ; and he lay, faint with restlessness, and sick with delayed expectation—for he dared not rise, lest his disordered step should betray his watchfulness—and his long continued listening, while it throbbed his temples with aching oppression, so confused his hearing, that each moment mocked him with some unreal sound, but to sink him into even bitterer disappointment.

At length a footstep crept softly along the gallery—he could not be mistaken—he jumped up on his couch to be the more secure of his correctness—the sound paused at his room-door—he believed his suspense to be at an end, and that the jester now came to conduct him on his errand. He waited but for the appointed signal, ere he sprung to meet him ; that same moment it came—a single low tap, announcing

that he was indeed sought. He hastily rose, and creeping softly to the door, that his tread might not betray his unseasonable watching to any chance waker, his hand was almost on the latch, when another and a louder tap, arrested his purpose. The impatience which that so quickly repeated application evinced, reminded him, that the signal expressly named by the jester varied entirely from that which now engaged his notice—he paused a moment—it was possible that Phœdrus, in his anxiety, might have overlooked the particular signal that he had appointed.

Albert was worn out with suspense, his impatience for its termination, and his anxiety to proceed with his mission overcame any more prudent considerations; he again put forth his hand to the latch—when at the same instant, another and an even louder knock again staggered him, and compelled him to more patient wariness. He crept softly to his couch, convinced that no anxiety or impatience, however

excessive, would cause the cautious Phœdrus so entirely to forget all regard to safety, which this loud and repeated summons so clearly demonstrated. Still did he eagerly wait some further sign for his proceeding ; his suspense was of no long continuance—a double rap sounded even louder than before—tired of any further delay, he instantly demanded, as if that moment awakened from his sleep, the cause of so unseasonable disturbance ; but there was no reply—he quickly advanced on tip-toe to the door, and listening with eager attention, plainly detected the stealthy footsteps of some one stealing softly away.

Albert could not too greatly congratulate himself on his escape from the believed snare laid for him ; and though its real design, as well as its actor, were alike unknown to him, his busy surmises, while they gave him many explanations, all seemed to resolve into one belief, that the page, De Laci, was, directly or indirectly, concerned in the intrusion.

The surprise and mental occupation resulting from this disturbance, so entirely engaged his attention, that Albert was not aware of a low scratching noise, that had for many minutes been soliciting his notice—instantly that he heard it, he knew, without one moment's hesitation, that it was the jester's summons—he waited not for any scrutiny, but at once gliding to the door, softly opened it. Phœdrus instantly crept in, his whole attitude, as far as the darkness permitted it to be seen, betokening extremest silence—

“Hush,” he softly whispered, holding Albert on the spot where he had opened the door, as if a single step were fatal; “hush—that cursed page is still watching for us, and one faintest noise will mar our wishes—the whole night I have marked him unseen, unsuspected, nor once has he slackened his watch; either must he have discovered our plans, or at all events have some not slight ground of suspicion.”

“Impossible, Phœdrus”—Albert spoke in

the same cautious whisper—" 'tis but his busy malice—e'en but a short hour ago he essayed to enter my chamber, and—"

"I witnessed the attempt," hurriedly interrupted the jester, "though I feared not for thy wariness—thou hast, however, somewhat diverted his suspicions, as having made the essay, he withdrew to the end of the gallery, where, overcome with fatigue, he soon dropped asleep. I have watched by him for some time, but still he moves not, and we must instantly seize the opportunity, or daylight will foil our purpose—take off your shoes, and step lightly for your life, and our dear princess's deliverance. Haste, haste—we have not an instant to lose." He seized Albert's hand, and drew him cautiously after him.

It was still dark, and with difficulty could objects be distinguished; the jester, however, seemed so well acquainted with the way, that he stepped boldly forward along the gallery, passing on as rapidly as caution, and his com-

panion's trembling hesitation permitted. Their steps were, indeed, noiseless as anxiety and apprehension could make them, but yet quick, for that a too long delay almost mocked their swiftest speed.

In a few moments they had reached the termination of the gallery, whence turning down a flight of steps, they would at once attain the object of their quest. Phœdrus drew back a moment, and pressed more forcibly his companion's hand—they listened attentively—the heavy breathings of the page, who lay on the ground before them, were distinctly heard, and seemed by their loudness to declare their safety from any present notice of his—they passed gently forwards for a few paces, and then, no longer in fear of disturbing his slumbers, hurried swiftly on, and soon gained the princess's chamber.

Phœdrus paused not an instant, but at once commenced his wonted signal, scratching against the door, as it might have been the nibbling



of a mouse. Almost the same moment the door was softly opened, and motioned by Phœdrus so to do, Albert at once passed forwards, and the same moment was in the princess's warm embrace. He could scarcely distinguish any objects for the dense gloom of the apartment, though he looked anxiously and eagerly round to learn in what manner the interview had been appointed, and to be assured that their conference was secure from observation; his eyes rested on the sleeping attendant of the princess, who, on a small couch, at the foot of the bed, seemed sunk in deepest sleep—Albert knew that Eleanor's believed condition, obliged some one to be constantly about her person, and still gazed inquiringly on her, as if doubtful of their security.

But the princess, who had turned to close the door after Albert, now again approached him, and at once perceiving his anxiety, eagerly assured him—

“ 'Tis all right—fear not Isolda—she is safe

as truth and potent drugs can make her—speak thy full soul to me—my heart yearns to hear thy words, and tell thee my many griefs. Oh ! how have I longed for thee—how miserable thy unlooked-for absence—speak to me, dearest, wherefore art thou troubled ?”

“ Cause have I enough for trouble, dear Eleanor,” returned the youth, kissing the anxious princess as he spoke : “ perplexed as well with surprise how this our meeting has been provided, as pain to see you thus disordered, and anxiety to deliver you from your bondage—for, therefore, Eleanor, am I come.”

“ Ask not,” anxiously returned the princess, “ how our interview has been brought about, rather satisfy my fearful anguish—alas ! too surely do I forbode that some calamity has attended our hopes.”

“ Refrain yourself, dearest Eleanor,” replied Albert, “ a cruel disappointment has, indeed, thwarted our best purposes ; but all is not thereby lost—delay we must submit to—I

trust not more, though my ill-omened mission has now but one object for its anxiety—your escape from this horrible thralldom, and return with me to the bosom of peace and affection.”

The princess trembled with agitation. “Is it indeed so?” she exclaimed in the bitterness of her despair, “then am I lost.”

“Oh! say not so, dearest Eleanor,”—Albert sought to soothe her evident anguish—“but cheer up, all may yet be as we wish it.”

“But I—oh, how am I to profit by any fortune—pent up in this torturing guise, where is there comfort for me?”

“But thou shalt no longer be pent up, Eleanor—am I not even now here to deliver you?”

“To deliver me?—do not mock me—*how* canst thou deliver me?”

Albert started at a question so wholly unexpected; he confusedly replied—

“Canst thou not thyself secure our retreat, Eleanor? All things are well prepared beyond these hated walls—the jester hinted thou hadst

the means—*how*, he suffered me not to ask—of providing our escape from this immediate bondage?”

The princess trembled violently, she seemed to stagger as if unable to support herself. Albert quickly caught hold of her, and almost himself as much agitated, anxiously demanded,

“What ails you, dearest Eleanor? Good God! surely there is no mistake?”

“Mistake!” bitterly groaned the princess, shaking off her momentary faintness; “oh! no—save in this fatal, unhappy trust, and that, alas! is despair.”

“Dearest Eleanor,” repeated Albert, with fearful anxiety, “what means your anguish? Oh! say not that you cannot indeed deliver us?”

“Alas! I cannot—that chance is past—and I am lost and miserable.”

“Speak, speak, Eleanor: surely Phœdrus is not treacherous, and his perfidy betrayed us into this trouble?”

"Oh! no, no—poor Phœdrus would gladly give his life for my happiness, and yet his ignorance is indeed our calamity. Poor Phœdrus! little does thy faithful heart guess the pitiless accident that mars thy well-meant plans."

"Oh! Eleanor," entreated Albert, "speak out your grief—in pity declare your disappointment, that even yet its consequences may be remedied."

"There is no remedy," replied the princess; "'tis beyond remedy, if indeed no other provision has been made for our escape. The means devised by the anxious Phœdrus no longer avail us—the secret passage which has so often befriended my steps, and which would now at once have delivered us, is no longer open—unknown to him, a wretched casualty has closed it against us."

"What passage, Eleanor?" demanded Albert, whose curiosity for the moment repressed

his more anxious feelings ; “ of what speak you ? ”

“ Almost close to my chamber door, there is a secret gallery, which a happy accident discovered to my use, and through the aid of which, have I not only gained the most secret counsels of the sanguinary tyrant, but also obtained the means—horrible as were those means, of torturing his guilty soul to the benefit of my plans ; through it too have I often escaped from my prison, and, my absence concealed by the trusty Isolda, more than once have done no small service to our anxious cause.”

“ And was it indeed you, Eleanor,” interrupted her astonished listener ; “ whose opportunity and mysterious caution to Lord Moubray, saved both him and our devoted De Bourgh from the usurper’s fangs ? ”

“ It was ; I had overheard the ruffian Jamy’s declaration to his master of his having detected

their appointment—for although the wretch had failed to distinguish their persons, I at once guessed it was none other ; and by forestalling their coming—as I knew not otherwise how to find De Bourgh—I warned them from their certain fate. But I did more ; fearful lest my caution should be disregarded, I yet hung on their steps unseen, and finding that the royal ruffian still watched for them, I scared his coward soul away by the semblance of the murdered Anne of Yves.”

“ Murdered !” exclaimed her listener ; “ ’twas said the *béauteous* orphan died of grief.”

“ Grief soon would have killed her—but not soon enough for her greedy murderer. This same secret gallery led by many steps into the deepest dungeons of this fearful place—it was here that the poor Anne was incarcerated. I had often sought her in her prison, to mitigate her captivity, and even to attempt her deliverance ; and a fearful, horrible chance made me present at her inhuman slaughter—the

kingly monster's own hand dealt the blow—and the poor victim had not strength to resist it. Agonized with the horrible sight, my tortured soul echoed forth her death-shriek—the shuddering walls again and again shouted it forth—and the appalled murderers rushed from that scene of blood, fainting with terror. I could not succour the poor Anne—the work had been indeed too surely done, but in some measure I avenged her—again and again did I torture the trembling ruffian with her bleeding resemblance; and more particularly on that ominous night, did I, by her mangled form, thwart his reckless schemes.”

The princess paused in her recital, as the quick indignation of her soul suffused her lovely countenance with even more exquisite beauty. Albert seemed overcome with astonishment.

“And are such,” he at length inquired, “the objects of your notice, Eleanor? Are such fearful scenes, the only solace of your



horrible solitude? Little indeed did we guess to whom that happy escape was due—an escape too, so full of promise.”

“But, alas!” bitterly rejoined the princess, “so fatal in its consequences. It was on that eventful night, that fearful lest my so long delayed return might betray my wanderings and endanger my poor Isolda’s safety, whom I had left to conceal my absence, I was compelled to incautious haste; and knew not—till it was too late, that in my rush to gain my chamber before the queen, whose steps were for a brief moment arrested by the watchful Phœdrus with well-dissembled terror of some feigned apparition, I had omitted to close the entrance of that friendly covert. Fatal omission, that one inadvertency declared the unknown way, and has closed it against us—for I had scarcely time to throw myself on my bed, as if asleep, than Isabella entered, and then, without giving me an opportunity of amending my

error, at once discovered the open door, and by some unknown casualty betrayed it to her husband. I watched the wretched destruction of my only solace, perhaps—and I foreboded it even at the time—my only safety—and it was desolation to me.”

“ Say not so, Eleanor ; unhappy as is the discovery, 'tis not so bad as that—even yet will we devise some plan to deliver you ; for I cannot—I will never return from my unprofitable errand without some reward for the misery it has cost me—thou, dearest Eleanor, shall be that reward, and thou shalt declare to the noble Brittany—if indeed his generous heart doubts the assurance of—”

His words were suddenly arrested—the chamber door was that instant opened, and the jester glided quickly in ; he cautiously closed and fastened the door, and then dropping on his knee, with one hand raised to secure instant silence, and the other pointing to the door, as

if in explanation of his intrusion as of the necessity of that silence, he remained motionless—his averted eyes declaring even more than his humble posture, his consciousness of his boldness. \*

The princess at first drew proudly up; but no sooner had she observed Phœdrus' anxious gestures, than she at once relaxed from her anger, nor hesitated to suppress her words, and listen as he seemed so evidently to ask.

A footstep came cautiously to the door—but stealthy as it was, those eager listeners readily detected it—it passed by—then quickly returned—again paused at the door—for many minutes did it pause, and seemed to wait for some expected sound—the watchers drew in their breath—they felt afraid lest the merest sound might detect their close scrutiny—the latch was slowly and noiselessly raised—but the drawn bolt balked that purpose of the intruder; it was then let gently down—then ano-

ther pause—and the footsteps passed on, their less cautious tread, assuring the anxious listeners that they were undiscovered.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,  
The place is dignified by the doer's deed."

SHAKESPEARE.

No sooner had the lurking footsteps passed from the door than the jester's manner seemed entirely changed ; his hand gradually descended from its previous attitude, as each successive tread sounded fainter and fainter, until it was now passive by his side ; his eyes fell to the ground, and he seemed as if oppressed by some inward trouble.

The princess was the first to break the silence; there was a severe dignity in her manner, and a harshness in her tone, that surprised Albert even more than her words.

“Ordgar, I fear thou wrongest my kindness, and takest advantage of my unhappy condition, or thou hadst not”—she paused—a gentler spirit came to her—“but I will not judge thee unkindly, nor pain thy anxious soul with any harsh sentiment—look up, thy intrusion is excused by its evident necessity.”

“Dearest lady,” returned the jester, in an altered tone from that he usually adopted, “thy safety, indeed, demanded my intrusion, or I had not dared to be so bold. Oh! Eleanor, canst thou indeed think that I could ever repay thy kindness with even a thought of presuming on thy sad condition? Oh! no—never respectful duty nor anxious affection so shrunk from the veriest shadow of offence, which even the chariest beauty could resent, than does the soul of your devoted Louvaine.”

“Louvaine!” exclaimed the amazed Albert, as, looking to the princess, he seemed to ask some further satisfaction of his astonishment. That action, however, and the pause which followed his exclamation, seemed to remind Eleanor of the new relation, which by her manner she had so plainly admitted towards the jester; and her conscious confusion kept her dumb.

“Even the same, fair cousin,” returned the feigned jester, striving to relieve the princess’ disorder. “Ordgar Louvaine forgets not happier days, if others do—even when I first beheld you, knowing your character to be but an assumed one, did I recognize the companion of many a fondly treasured delight.”

“And is it, indeed, possible,” returned the wondering Albert, still overwhelmed with astonishment, “that your young affection has led you thus to hide yourself from the world, and assume this degraded office?”

“Yes, this office—any office,” vehemently

exclaimed Louvaine—"my rank—my fortune—my life, were nothing to this dear creature's welfare—her affection dearer than every other good."

"Ah! too devoted Ordgar," exclaimed Eleanor, at the same time giving him her hand in token of her favour—"thou hast indeed devoted thyself—indeed proved thy firm affection: thy kindness and soothing consolation alone have carried me through the miserable ordeal I have endured, and saved me from despair."

"Whatever I have suffered for you, Eleanor," ardently replied Louvaine, "is well recompensed by so dear an acknowledgment—but do not say that I presume upon your kindness."

"I will not, I do not! Generous soul! I would not so wrong your tender consideration; though, methinks, Ordgar, as even yourself must admit, that a maiden's chamber is not exactly the spot to certify your respect—But a truce to lighter thoughts, even to all pleasur-



able feelings; extreme and instant purposes demand our attention, and to your guidance do I trust myself. You already know the necessity of immediate flight from the horrible bonds, to which, at first, from compulsion, and latterly, from anxious policy, I have submitted—canst thou provide my deliverance, for, alas! Ordgar, the secret gallery is no longer our's."

"So, Eleanor," answered Louvaine, in a faltering tone, that betrayed his extreme anxiety, "I have suspected, as well from your absence from our trysting-place, as the evident disorder in the whole household, though I have only now, as I waited by the door, ascertained the actual fact: for I would not, even for the satisfying of so extreme a doubt, break through your injunction, never to attempt that hidden entrance save at your bidding. Alas, alas! why did you neglect my oft entreaties to secure your safety, while the way was open to you? fatal neglect! for what does the sacrifice profit?"

"Cease, cease, Ordgar," quickly returned the princess; "I may not listen to such words—it was my duty—every dear hope, and every dear feeling—save one, demanded it."

"And but for that one," rejoined Louvaine, "I had compelled your escape—the doubt lest it was selfishness, rather than the mere regard for your welfare, that urged me to insist upon it—or even, dear Eleanor, lest you might *suspect* me of so unworthy a motive, alone repressed my securing you from a risk, which, I felt, might any hour cut off your retreat."

"You did right, Ordgar," added the princess; "had you pressed my earlier flight, I should, indeed, have withdrawn my favour, for I should no longer have esteemed you; but 'tis worse than folly to speak of what might have been—the only question now is, what can still be done?"

"And that," mournfully replied Louvaine, "I cannot answer; the sudden and, in spite of my fears, unlooked for disappointment of the

only plan I had provided for our escape, entirely staggers me, for there is no time nor opportunity for any remedy—the court sets off this very day.”

“If another day,” quickly interrupted the anxious Eleanor, “would at all assist your plans, it is your’s—the court’s departure is again deferred until to-morrow.”

Louvaine was silent, absorbed in deep musings—the princess watched each expression of his countenance with fearful anxiety, for too well did she know, that on him alone now hung her deliverance from a thralldom, whose endurance had been miserable enough, but the very thought of whose continuance was agony. Various were the emotions that marked his reverie, but at length a brighter promise seemed to animate him. “Even yet,” he exclaimed, his cheerful tone declaring his hopes ere he expressed them, “even yet will we break this cursed bond and secure our happiness—the warder of the eastern gate is our firm friend,

and will at any risk aid our plans—while therefore you, so far, secure your escape, I will contrive to draw off the guards on some feigned pretext, and so enable you to elude their notice—despite this our present disappointment, oh ! well will we yet foil this merciless tyrant and attain our deliverance.”

“ Ah, Ordgar,” rejoined the princess, repressing the joyful prospect which his words opened to her, “ too fondly dost thou promise, what thy zeal so ardently would wish, rather than that circumstances now permit us to hope for, or thou wouldst scarcely have suggested a plan so fraught with hazard and so little likely of any happy result.”

“ Nay, dearest Eleanor,” entreated Albert, who before had hesitated to interrupt their conversation, “ do not damp your faithful Louvaine’s hopes by even the thought of any ungrateful doubt ; too well have I seen in Phœdrus’ management for my past good, that his skill can bring about even apparent im-

possibilities, and remove all difficulties that may confront us—let us trust to him and all will be well.”

“Our sweet cousin counsels wisely,” rejoined Louvaine, “as the event shall prove, but let us not tarry longer now; some bad spirit evidently watches for us, and there will be enough of anxious work to be done. As soon after midnight as it is practicable, we will be again here, I trust, prepared to redeem my pledge, and deliver our noble Eleanor from a captivity, which but for her too devoted feelings had long since terminated.”

“Then cheer up, dearest Eleanor,” added Albert, with tenderest solicitude, “since you have both the satisfaction of having fulfilled your believed duty, as also the certainty of your deliverance from the danger it might have entailed upon you.”

The princess smiled mournfully, as if she would, yet could not, feel his kind assurance. But a new danger threatened them, the sleeping

attendant seemed to be awakening from her lethargy—almost, from her deep respiration and low mutterings, as if conscious of what was passing so near her; and though the princess could well trust her fidelity, she had not the same confidence in her discretion, nor, above all, wished to subject herself to the explanation, which such an assemblage in her chamber would compel her to make. She signed therefore their instant withdrawing, an injunction which was as speedily attended to, as her veriest apprehension could have wished.

The seeming jester led the way, cautiously listening for the first intimation of any lurking danger; it was now almost light, and, conscious how entirely they were exposed to observation, they hurried along the gallery, striving by their speed to shorten the period of their danger as their only possible means of diminishing its risk.

They had gained the second gallery, and

were now stealing quickly up the steps which led to Albert's apartment, when Louvaine, who had nigh wound round the turn of the stairs, hurriedly drew back—he seemed bewildered with some sudden perplexity—hesitated for one single moment—then whispering to Albert, who had anxiously approached him—“ Back, for your life,” at once passed forwards.

The youth felt paralyzed by the suddenness of the unknown peril, more than its supposed extent ; he seemed without the power to follow the hurried injunction, nor indeed had he altogether understood it ; he stood still, irresolute how to proceed, when the feigned tones of the jester, as if seeking rather to excite than propitiate the ready anger of some one he had encountered, reached his notice.

“ Stand back, minion,” quickly interrupted the hated voice of De Laci.

Albert required no further impetus to rouse him from his stupor — that same instant he rushed swiftly back, and sought, as the more

probable escape, to regain Eleanor's apartment ere the envious page detected him.

The princess' door was locked—he dared not knock, lest the sound might direct the hasty steps, which appeared to be so instantly following him along the gallery. He whispered faintly against the door, but his voice was unheard—he essayed to imitate the jester's signal, but his extreme agitation perplexed the attempt. There was no time for any pause—no leisure for any consideration—no opportunity for any other course—his longer stay seemed destruction—the very thought of retreat madness, for even now, as if either he had detected his flight, or that some previous suspicion directed his steps, De Laci advanced quickly along the gallery.

There was barely a possibility of eluding his notice—the princess' door was the last in the gallery, save that of the secret passage—it was scarcely possible that its mystery should be known to the youth, and yet such a chance



was his only prospect of escape—Albert pressed himself closer within the door-way, where he stood, and awaited the result in fearful trembling.

De Laci passed him—minutely examined the secret door, listening with intense eagerness, as if he thought to gain some wished for intelligence. The object of his suspicion seemed at once explained to the agitated watcher—he instantly concluded that the cause of the youth's so persisted vigilance was none other, than the hope of detecting the intruder in that hidden way, a vigilance urged on perhaps by the promise of high reward from his jealous patron.

So extreme was De Laci's attention, that Albert thought he might then have escaped him—he almost resolved to make the attempt, when the page, as if foiled in his purpose, suddenly quitted the door, and turned to retrace his steps—that same instant had Albert leaned forward in his half determined purpose ;

and though quick as thought he slunk back into his covert, which, however slight, would probably have concealed him from one so absorbed in musings as De Laci now was, that single movement betrayed him.

De Laci's exulting smile, while it evinced his contented malice, assured the conscious Albert how fatal was the discovery; he regarded him in silent confusion—silent indeed as conscious guilt—confused as his own bewildered feelings and the page's malignant triumph could conjoin to render him.

But that bitter endurance was not long: De Laci indeed regarded him but for a few brief moments in that searching contempt, long as they appeared to the disordered Albert, and then without a word, or one further look, save a parting one of bitterest scorn, proudly passed away.

It was some moments—they might be minutes, ere Albert recovered from his confusion;

and it was with no happy step, that starting as it were from a trance, he hurried quickly to his chamber, now free even from the chance of any further molestation.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"What terrors round him wait!  
 Amaze in his van, with flight combin'd,  
 And sorrow's faded form, and solitude behind."

PERHAPS no event could better have contented the rancorous envy, which, as a smothered flame, had so long struggled within De Laci's breast to burst out in some ruthless destruction, than the discovery, which accident had thus made to him, that Albert was, as he at once concluded from all the circumstances of his detection, the possessor of the secret of the hidden gallery, and in consequence the be-

holder, if not the inciter of the tyrant's guilty fears, for whose discovery a high reward had been offered.

His intrusive notice of Albert's movements had indeed sprung from no other source, save that never-resting one of his jealousy; each suspicion that the several doubtful circumstances in his conduct, which his industry had detected, gave rise to, terminated in the same explanation, and, satisfied of the fact, he only waited some proof, ere he delivered him to his known destruction.

Such a proof was now in his power, and exulting as well in the prospect of his own advancement in the royal favour, as of his rival's ruin, he sought eagerly the king's private closet, where he knew that John would first appear on his rising; and there waited with all the impatience of so thirsty revenge for the certain gratification which would soon be his. Nor in the lengthened delay, which for a time hauled his purpose through the tyrant's tardy

coming, did he fail to please his imagination with the almost certain promise of even yet possessing the lovely Maud's affections, when his more favoured rival should be no more to thwart his hopes—for even as the jester had warned the youth, that unhappy preference was the origin and the end of his hatred—and then, as the exulting dream passed before him, did he the more firmly resolve to attain his purpose, if even by the most horrible falsehoods.

Meanwhile the object of his hate sat within his chamber, perplexed with his new difficulties, unknowing how to proceed—not even attempting to escape—as if without one single hope, either for himself or her safety, for whom he had encountered such great and renewed peril. It was possible, indeed, that trusting in Louvaine's speedy succour, which his known truth assured to him, he cared not to attempt otherwise to fly from the ruin which, he felt, hung so imminently over him—or that in the jester's

certain knowledge of their danger and his continued absence, there was yet some hope of their deliverance.

But though another hour, and yet another went by, still the jester came not, and still was the irresolute Albert without a guide to direct his proceedings. He knew, indeed, that his peril each moment became more certain—but still he could not prevail upon himself to desert the purpose for which he had given himself to so great dangers and painful deprivations, without securing any one good result, or even an approach to its advancement—how, indeed, could he return to him who had sent him, and whose sanguine hopes had far exceeded his own ardent ones in the full belief of their fulfilment, with so wretched a story—so miserable a disappointment of every expectation? it was impossible—he could not go—and still he was there, in that same perplexing hesitation.

A light tap at his door aroused him from his musings—anxiety suggested that it was

Louvaine, and hope assured him it could be none other than that, his now only deliverer. He sprung to the door and quickly opened it—Well might he startle with surprise, and astonishment keep him mute, when he beheld the Lady Maud standing before him.

Oh ! pale was she as grief—wan as “Sorrow’s lone, dejected daughter,”—faint as despairing melancholy—wild as distraction. Albert gazed upon her shrunken form and faded beauty with heartfelt pity—a pity which not even his amazement at her strange visit, or his own distress, in any respect diminished. She seemed agitated by some inward trouble—a feverish haste urging her on, while her maiden diffidence held her back from some anxious purpose. She seemed to struggle with conflicting emotions—brief was the struggle—she hurriedly advanced into the chamber, and closed the door ; Albert’s increased astonishment neither seeking to prevent her purpose, nor inquire its meaning. It was, indeed, needless for him to



ask any explanation—soon enough did he learn it—and fearful, indeed, was its knowledge.

Scarcely had the trembling maiden closed the door, than, forcing down the dreadful excitement, which, as a huge ball, seemed to rise in her throat and almost suffocate her, she exclaimed, in a voice of shuddering horror, whose very wildness shocked her hearer, as much as its fearful announcement—

“Fly, fly from this fatal spot—even now murderers seek thy blood—their inhuman steps come fastly on thee, and the next moment—” her feelings were too intense—a fearful groan burst from her, and she seemed to gasp for existence.

Albert flew to support her, at the same time earnestly soothing her excitement with kindest accents ;—

“Be composed, dear lady—do not, do not yield to such—too violent emotions. If for me—”

“If for *thee*, indeed !” wildly interrupted the maiden, starting from his support. “Breathe

not a doubt—think not a hesitation—or thou art lost. Haste—haste—I would not see thee die.”

“What meanest thou, sweet Maud,” anxiously demanded Albert, whose sympathy for the suffering maiden was quickly lost in anxiety for his own preservation; “what is the danger that so nearly threatens me?”

“Wait not to ask it, but at once fly ere it is upon you—the tyrant has doomed your death, and I have but learnt it in time to save you. Haste—oh! haste—misery as you have been to me, I would be salvation to you—cruel as is my own fate, I would deliver you even to my preferred rival—I would have *you* happy, De Bourgh—even if I am lost and miserable.”

“Poor, generous girl, talk not of misery—oh! may peace and happiness—”

“Hush, hush!” wildly entreated the sufferer, “talk not of that—do not mock me—there is no peace—oh, no—but one happiness in this world, and that your deliverance, ere it is too

late,"—she seemed confused, faintly adding in even a more hollow voice, "I ask not more, save the one small comfort, ere we part for ever—to know that you do not hate me?"

"*Hate* thee, poor girl!" repeated the pitying youth, at the same time kissing her cold, shrunken hand, "Oh, no! truly, faithfully do I love you—"

"Do not mock me, De Bourgh,"—the maiden seemed bewildered with some imperfect consciousness—"do not twice destroy me—thou knowest thou lovest another—that there is an impassable barrier—" She started from her confused ramblings. "Of what was I talking? fond, weak fool!—thinking of love and bliss, when death, and blood, and horror, are before me. Ah, they come—why hast thou tarried? will not one victim suffice, that we must both die? Quick—quick! throw this mantle and this thick veil over thee, and pass instantly away—the right hand will take thee

from the murderers—they will not spare for a simple maiden, such as thou wilt seem to be. And thou, Maud?" asked the still hesitating Albert. "Madman?" almost screamed the horrified girl, as she flung over him the hasty disguise, and urged him with her utmost strength to the door, "wouldest thou sport with death, has a horrible end no sickening horror to thee? Quickly, or the next moment thou art a bleeding corpse!" She wildly hurried him to the door, and forcing him from the room with a strength, that seemed entirely beyond her feeble weakness, it closed against him. He listened for a moment, and falling on his knees, as his retreating steps, unpursued, assailed her of his escape, wildly thanked the God of mercy for his deliverance—and then came one brief prayer for herself, that—but she felt not the words her mouth then uttered—her lips now scarcely moved—her whole soul was absorbed

by a fearful, heavy step that came sluggishly along the gallery. One cry for mercy burst from her; as starting to her feet she sought to throw herself on the couch that Albert had just quitted. She was fainting with weakness—giddy with terror—the room swam round with her, and she had nigh fallen to the ground ere she attained her object; when, as if with Nature's last, despairing effort, she sprung upon the bed, and quickly covering herself up with the cloak which the youth had thrown off, she lay trembling with horror, and convulsed with terrible agony.

Those fatal footsteps still approached—had now paused at the door—too well did she know their fearful import—and as the door was cautiously opened, her maddened brain seemed to torture her with fresh images of horror—ghastly spectres seemed to flit before her; and to mock her frail reason as if with a thousand waving hands—her soul's agony almost shrunk

from the appointed ordeal, and even now, when the sacrifice was almost consummated—for already was the murderer stealing softly to her couch—did she think to fly the horrid doom. But it was then too late, Nature was exhausted with anguish, and fainting with agony, her feeble limbs obeyed not the impulse—her gurgling voice lent not its aid—it was too much for human endurance—and that same moment she sunk into a swoon, nor felt the murderous gash which then pierced her broken heart, and robbed her young life of its existence.

The reckless murderer waited not long with his victim—but to be sure that the work of death was well performed; the motionless corse before him too truly assured him of that; when hastily quitting the chamber, he sought some ready means of disposing of the body.

But that place of blood was not left long to death's sole dominion—a trembling, yet daring step came nearer and nearer to the victim—its

oft hesitation betraying, that however extreme might be the purpose what brought him there, his dread scarcely permitted him to execute it. It was the insatiate De Laci, the suborner of that horrid deed—he came, as well to glut his eyes, though the sight might shudder his inmost soul, with the mangled corse of his rival, as in hopes of finding on his person some token of the Lady Maud's favour, which his rankling jealousy sought to snatch away, that not even the bleeding grave might have one sign of her fatal preference.

He trembled, indeed, as the lifeless body lay before him, and he thought by what lying accusations he had procured his destruction ; but there was neither compunction, nor regret, nor pity in that trembling—it was but the quaking of a coward's soul—he strove to reason away his dread, and thought that the dead could not harm him, that his hated rival was now beyond even a woman's fear. A bolder resolution came to him—he rushed forwards to

the body and drew off the cloak—when the convulsed features of the murdered Maud met his sight, her glazed eyes seemingly fixed in accusing agony on her horror-struck murderer.

END OF VOL. II.

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